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This magazine is dedicated to B. Travin, Anthony
Burgess, T.S. Eliot, Daniel Ellsberg, Tom Paine, Jack
Anderson, J. D. Salinger, Ring Lardner, Truman Capote,
Walt Kelly, The Whole Earth Catalog, the Colossus of
Rhodes, the Great Wall of China, and to John Updike
who will not be judging the contents of this magazine
this year.

Photographic credits

young girl — Ric Manning

other photos and cover —

Thomas F. MacDonald



The Night Time Shore

*You'll become, by the end, toothless, wondering, maybe seated upon
the night time shore or cast motionless in the dumps witnessing the
endless smoldering as your self, the washed up dried weed upon
the night time shore, wondering, when you've gotten to this simplicity
why this, why what I am, why am I still not loving the first love upon
the night time shore, casted burning cheeks to the wind, coming off the sea,
eyes afire burning in their sockets beneath the stars in their warm heaven upon
the night time shore tranquil in my loneliness
falling to dream*

*you come before me, lady who will not rest
eyes upon me, who will not ease the growing distance
by putting her palm to glass*

*who will not make connection
whose fingers will not encircle my bicep whose drifting ship will not
cast ropes to shore,*

*I remain enduring stone, dimmed slightly by your ice,
unextinguishable, I wait, feeding on slips of your desire, coming from your
controlled cold flesh, beyond your oppression like a fish from the sea
fighting for heaven,*

*and caught again so quickly you become a sky of concrete ending his leap
and become the gravity forcing the image back beneath your flesh,
uping once again the mask of your face,
glazing over your eyes to frost blossoms upon glance
and settling finally, emotionless, the pool stilled over
and no one would have known*

*they all would have past or said hello at the most, but I remain
having seen your need rise from the sea and glitter in the sun, a moment—*

*My senses regain, the warm star freckled heavens, and broken lighted sea
enter my sight like a wave rushing between stones,
the warm wind brushes my flesh
my ass feels the sand
I've been sitting upon
the night time shore.*

steve behrsing

An Unmanly Bullet At Mary Ann

*Lady whose eyes are holes
venturing back to pre-life black
and whose hands lay draped
over tombstones cold*

*Your name is that of the image
which comes before me as I play
breaking me
to the floor
broken
crushed
crying
God
as my flute
held between my hands
like a baseball bat
comes down on your skull
and crushes it like
a crow bar smashing a tomato*

*You said good-by
with a final close of your eyes
such that we would never again
enter into each others lives.*

*Sealed off
standing on the cold outside
my eyes pleaded
over extended from their sockets
like a hermit crab dangling
dangerously naked
from his shell*

now

*I'd never again reach for you
even if forever we were lost together
in the barren land between our eyes
I'd never again reach for you*

steve behrsing

*Go play your flute for the hundreds of deaf, so they
may once again hear true happiness, you fraud. Please
go, the audience of corpses is anxiously waiting in
silence to hear the master, the kind, the king of die-
hards make it once more, to prove he has not yet fallen
off the train of unloved, unthought-of undesirables.
You have as much respect for that flute as you have for
your own soul. And you'd sell your soul faster than a
used-car salesman if you thought it would flock people
to your feet who loved you; and in return you'd buy them
like you'd buy a pad of writing paper to manipulate;
as you treat everything you touch.*

Mary Ann Graham

JUST CUZ

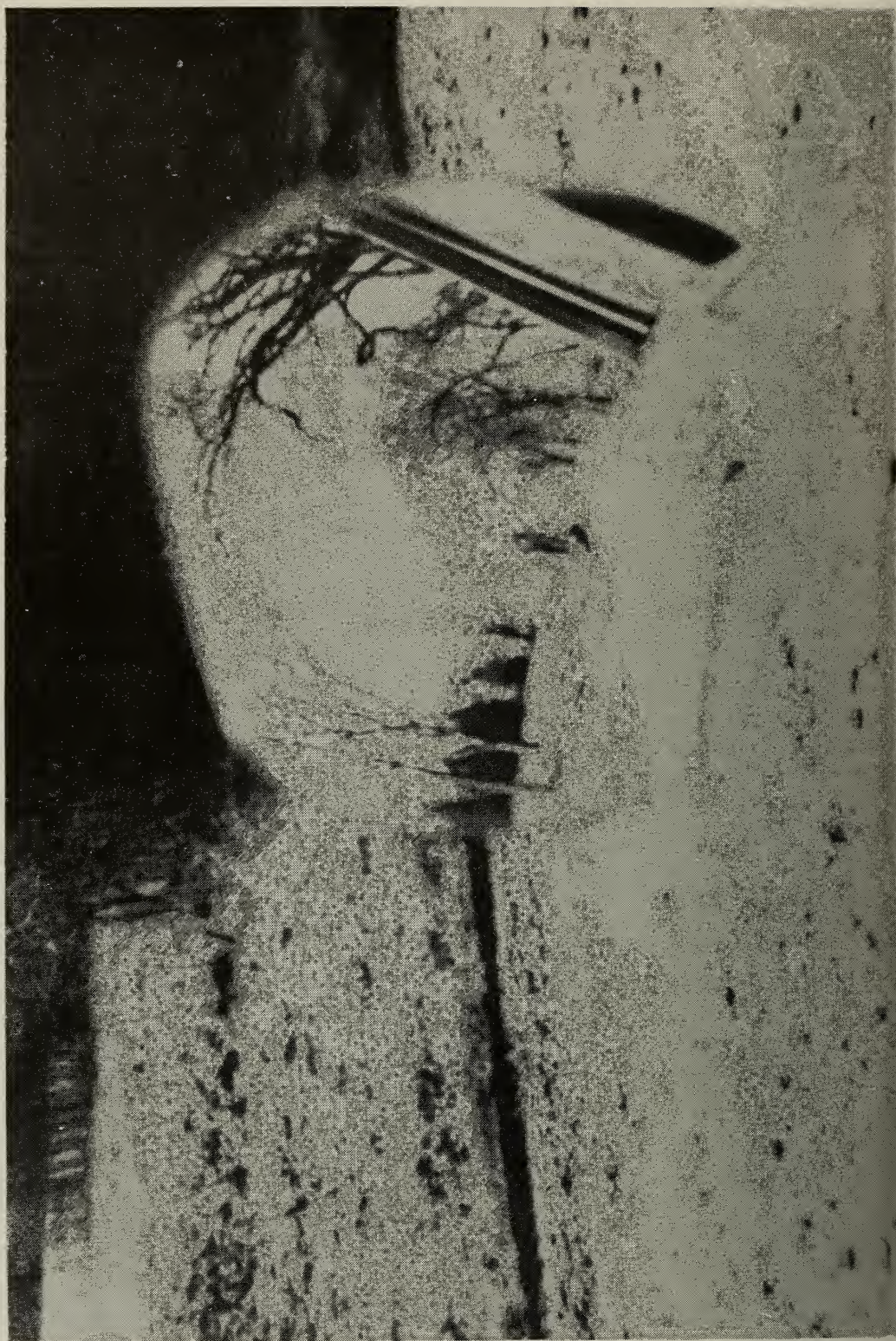
*Just cuz you think you're so great;
just cuz you run the whole show;
Don't think I'm gonna miss ya, just cuz.*

*Just cuz you've given me spring;
just cuz you've taught me everything;
Don't think I have to love ya, just cuz.*

*Just cuz when you kiss me I melt in your arms;
just cuz our minds can touch;
that doesn't mean you own me ya-know, just cuz.*

*Things do change, and I've changed.
Don't try and stop me, cuz I'm leaving, just cuz.*

Penny Fisher



How I Learned To Live Within Certain Physical Limitations Or Why I Would Never Sell Stoneware Door To Door

The following story is true. The names haven't been changed to protect the innocent. My name is Tuesday, this is my partner Saturday. We are not cops. As a matter of fact I'm an inventor. Sat is a coffee cup handle maker with the local coffee cup factory. He belongs to union local 472973586 of the handle makers inc. He gets to go to all those union meetings and wears funny hats and goes bowling afterward. I don't get to have any of that kind of fun cause I don't belong to a union. My only claim to distinction, and a dubious one at that, is that I was a rock for twenty-four hours.

By now you are probably chuckling to yourself, and having weird thoughts about my sanity. Well, just you read on and I feel that you will be a bit shocked to learn that what I am saying is the truth. I do not fabricate. That is one thing my father taught me, he said, "Do not fabricate, as it will make your hair fall out." I'll always remember my father sitting in his favorite easy chair, with the light casting a soft glow over his hairless head, telling me never to fabricate and never to exaggerate. If he told me once he told me a million times about the social hazards of those two sins against my fellow man. But anyway let me go on with the story, or at least the way I remember it.

It all started back in nineteen sixty seven, the summer of that year. I had been spending the warm months in the town of Phlogiston, in the state of Kansas. It was really a sort of revealing vacation to me. I was learning so much about the wonders of nature by living with nature. Just a short distance outside of town, where the wooded area began, I had constructed a small lean to. The entire structure, modest though it was, had been designed by me. Working with just my bare hands, a badly rusted boyscout knife, an army hatchet, a coal scoop, and two dozen rocks, I built the hut, or lean to, as I prefer to call it. Of course I also used some nine hundred pounds of ten penny nails.

When I had finished building the hut, I stood back to admire it. There it stood, looking much like the house that Jack built, whoever he was. Of the fourteen rooms in my lean to, thirteen were crooked. But even with the crooked rooms the structure was appealing to me. The overall measurements of the building were, eighty-three feet four and seven thirty seconds inches long, by two feet five and nine sixteenth inches wide.

I'll admit that the hut probably was not the best designed building in the world, as far as the dimensions went, but then again I never did claim to be an architect.

Anyway I was now set to live in the great out-doors. I had made plans to live as an herbivorous person. Besides, the nine hundred pounds of nails had taken all my money, so I was left without money enough to buy meat. In fact, while I lived there, the only time I had any meat at all was one morning when I woke up with a frog in my throat. Well, actually, it wasn't really a frog, it was more like a tree toad. What I ate mostly, however, was roots, shrubs, and leaves. I would have eaten some of the grass, but at fifteen dollars a weight ounce, I got more pleasure out of smoking it.

Living as I was living, with no obligations, I found that I had much free time, after I had gathered nuts for the winter. Being a thrifty person, my father always told me I was thrifty, I did not want to waste any of my time so I got out papers and pencils and set to work inventing.

My first invention was a way to get a line of fourteen complete paper dolls cut out of a six by nine sheet of paper with just one slice of the knife. The proper way to do that, you see, is to hold the paper the long way down. Then you fold over the upper left corner down to one and a quarter inches at a thirty-five degree angle. Next you bend the bottom to five inches and fold across the middle two, then holding it crosswise, you will find the upper right can now be creased at a forty degree angle to the perpendicular of the bottom left under the center allowing approximately seven-sixteenths of an inch from the side edge. Now you use a retainer from the left front on a sixty six Mustang self adjuster and a Salem filter laid end to end with a forty thousands gap and measure the overall. Take the precise length, divide it by half the diameter of a Fanta cap and subtract two, leaving you with a number which is irrelevant to the cutting of paper dolls. However it is a good way to pass the time.

To get back to the paper, you must now fold it the long way three times, or is it four times, no maybe it's two, well no matter, just fold it. Take the long strip like appearing paper and put into it two short then two long bends. The short bends must be one half the length of the long ones, which must be exactly twice the length of the short ones. But the length is quite important or rather than the fourteen paper dolls you will cut out a caricature of the face of Richard Nixon, (whoever he is). After the paper has been folded you may make the slice with your knife. The incision should now be made with great care, using a blade no thicker than one thirty-second of an inch and which has been heat treated in the fifth furnace and dipped in the third tank in the Case Plant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The cut is now made at an oblique angle of seven degrees from the mean straight, allowing no more than one, one-thousandth of an inch in each direction.

If these instructions are followed closely you will have a strip of fourteen paper dolls in your hand, which is something to be proud of. Actually, a child could follow these instructions with very little difficulty.

Now to continue:

During the span of time I spent in the woods, making discoveries and inventing new and useful inventions, I also developed an interesting understanding of the insects and animals. For instance I learned that those little things with yellow bodies and black stripes, that fly from flower to flower and make a buzzing sound, live in trees, and in these trees they have some sort of factories where they make honey. Now, honey is a very sweet, thick substance which I had often purchased in stores to spread on toast. After all, that's what honey was made for. But boy, that little discovery about those little yellow things really excited me. Being from the city, I, of course, already knew that honey was made in a factory, out of old milk, or something. Now I knew that I could get it for free, out there in the Phlogiston Woods. That, however, was not the real discovery I made about those little yellow things. The real discovery came when I tried to get some of that free honey. It seems that you can't just reach into the hole in the tree and take what you want. If you do, then you will learn, just as I did, about the excruciating pain. I would like to point out that the best way to stop the yellow things from biting you, is to jump into the nearest lake, pond or water hole, and stay submerged for at least fifteen minutes. After that period of time the yellow things will think that you have drowned and will then fly away. Of course unless you have super good lungs or just happen to be wearing a divers mask and lungs you just might drown.

Another important thing I discovered was, if you ever happen to be in the woods and come across a black bear, run.

But it appears that I am getting away from the explanation of how I became a rock. As I recall, I was digging a hole, with my coal scoop, and as I reached about the three foot mark, deep that is, I came upon a hard metallic object. Digging around it I found that I was able to lift it and doing so placed it on the ground to the side of the hole. I felt that the hole was rather important, or I would have investigated the metal object right then. The hole, however, was pertinent to my health and welfare in my woodland abode. You see, the normal human body has certain functions which it must perform. Among these functions are two which must be performed in the sitting and standing position. If I may be so bold as to mention them by the names my gang had for them, they were called number one and number two. I'm sorry to be so risqué, but quite often I feel that I must speak bluntly if I am to be understood.

At any rate, when I finished digging my cesspool, I turned my concentration to the metal object I had dug up. Taking it into my lean to, I began to brush away the dirt which was stuck all over the thing. As I cleaned it off it began to take on a definite shape and when it was completely cleaned off I still could not figure out what it was. But then I turned it over in my hands and it dawned on me that I had had it upside down all that time. It was a magic lantern. By now you are probably saying to yourself that I must be some kind of ding-a-ling cause in the first place there is no such of a thing as a magic lantern and in the second place even if there is such of a thing as a magic lantern how could I know that that was what I was holding? Well, very simple. Engraved across the top were the words, "Magic Lantern Rub In Circular Motion made in Japan Pat. Pending."

It seemed like quite a coincidence that I found the lantern cause just that morning I had been saying to myself that it sure would be nice if I could find a magic lantern. Well, anyway, I rubbed the top of the lantern in a circular motion and a thin wisp of smoke began to rise out of the spout. I set the magic lantern down on the table, which I had made myself out of an old used theater marquee I had found in the dump. As I sat back and watched the smoke it began to fill out and take shape and suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, a genie appeared.

He was a bit bedraggled so to speak, but there he was, a real live genie. Well, not alive really, but he was whatever genies are. He stared at me a moment or two before he said anything. After scrutinizing me he proclaimed in a loud, table rattling voice, "Do you know what you have just done?" Of course I didn't know what I had just done so I said, "No, what." He looked back at me and told me what I had just done. You see, he and this girl genie had gotten together over at his place, and he had been trying for a long time to make some headway with her. Anyway, after trying for so many hundreds of years to get her to see things his way he almost succeeded. He probably would have made it except that I had found his lantern and rubbed it at the wrong time. In fact, right then the girl genie was waiting patiently for him to return to his lair and proceed with what he had started, whatever that was.

Mr. Genie then told me that as much as he disliked having to do it, he was bound under the official genie code to grant me a wish. Any wish I wished. He then told me to hurry up and think up a good wish, but take my time. As a sort of a footnote he added that I had better make my wish a good wish or during the wish I would probably wish I had, or something.

So I mulled over the wish possibilities for several seconds and made my decision. I looked him squarely in the eye and announced my wish. In a voice full of knowing, to me anyway, I exclaimed "I want, for twenty-four hours, be a rock—" and shazam, there I was, a rock. Now that sort of teed me off, cause the genie was in such a hurry to get back to his girl genie that he didn't let me finish my wish. What I had started to say was that for twenty-four hours, I wanted to be a Rockafella. I figured that if I was a Rockafella for twenty-four hours then I would be rich for that length of time. If I were rich for twenty-four hours, then I could buy all the things I've always wanted, and give them to myself for when I'm no longer Rockafella.

That was what I wanted. What I got was the glorious life of a rock. Rock for a day, that was me. How unexciting, spending a whole day doing all the things a rock does, like lying around.

Now, being a rock was bad enough as it is, but the genie placed me alongside a fairly heavily traveled roadway. If he had left me in my cabin that wouldn't have been so bad, but there I was along the road. If I had been able to breathe, I would have perished lying there. The carbon monoxide from the autos exhaust was terrible.

Well, here I was, destined for twenty-four hours, to live the gay carefree life of a rock. As I lay there I began to think that actually, although most people consider the rock to be something less than a gay blade the assumption is wrong. Oh its true that the rock may not have the exciting adventurous life of a Don Quiote, but still and all, considering what it has to work with, it manages to formulate some excitement for itself.

Now take the day on which I was a rock. After I had gotten over my disgust with the genie and his impatience, which left me in the predicament I was in, I began to use my mind to get what good I could out of the twenty four hours. To begin with I examined myself, from the inside out (which a rock is able to do) and ran down a mental list of my composition. I, Tuesday The Rock, was made out of granite with a couple small veins of quartz, small but noticable. There was also, in my composition, some negligible amounts of shale, mica, and rosin. Apparently rocks such as myself had been formed during the Pleistone period a few million years ago.

When you get right down to the nitty gritty of it being a rock wasn't so bad. I didn't have the normal cares and worries as a rock that I had as a human. During the day I did not find myself growing hungry or thirsty. In fact, being a normally lazy individual, I rather enjoyed being a rock. There was no need for physical exertion on my part. I mean, how tiring is it physically to just lay in one spot. It got to be pretty wonderful just lying around watching the carloads of people go by. That is something else. Rocks can see. It is hard to explain how and why rocks can see, and unless you have ever been a rock yourself you will never fully understand the reasoning behind it. As a way of explaining let me say that nature is a wonderful thing.

A lot of things were explained to me in various ways, during my hitch as a rock. Like for instance, during that shower the sand which was under my rock hard body, was shifted around so that I in turn moved just a little from my former position. Until that happened I had just taken it for granted that rocks had legs.

Also, as it rained, I felt the water washing me and making me clean. That was good, because as a human I hadn't been able to take a shower for quite a while. But as the rain washed me it also washed some of me away. The amount of me which was lost was nearly unmeasurable, but still and all I had lost it. Of course I was a big rock with about a twenty-six inch circumference so I didn't worry too much. I figured that at the rate the rain was washing me away I would be around for at least another couple of hundred thousand years.

Suddenly a car came screeching to a halt right beside me. As his tires locked up the sand and rocks they came in contact with were sent spinning in all directions. Some of the sand pelted me, knocking minute particles from my body. I attempted to recoil in horror at the sight of a large stone coming through the air at me. Of course this was rather difficult to do. Recoil, I mean. If you know anything about the structure of a rock you would know what I mean. Anyway, the stone glanced off my side and took with it at least a four ounce piece of my hide, if I may call the outside of me a hide.

The automobile finally stopped and the people got out of it. It was a man and a very attractive young lady. They apparently stopped to look at the scenery because the man had a pair of binoculars with him. The man told the lady to sit on the rock and try to be comfortable while he checked something out. I guess I forgot to mention the fact that rocks can hear also. The reason that rocks can hear without the intricate and wonderful hearing system that the human body has been issued is the same reason that rocks can see, because nature is wonderful.

Then, moment of wonderful moments, the pretty girl sat on me. Ah, what words could do justice to the feeling I felt as the warmth of her spread itself to my being. Never, in my callous, wasteful, uniformed, naive life, have I ever felt the joy I felt then. To think that a beautiful, well built, luscious, warm morsel, such as this young lady, would see fit to place her sit down parts on my cold unyielding being. Sheesh. Unfortunately I had one complaint. She sat on my seeing parts. Now under normal conditions this could be to my advantage, normal conditions to me being while I was a human, heh heh.

But enough of the dirty young man type talk. I'll stop the digression and continue with my story. It was unfortunate that the girl, vivasciously sexy though she was, had sat upon the very objects which allowed me to see out of my rocky shell, for you see, rocks being the weirdly put together creatures that they are, are not able to hear if they cannot see. The best way to describe this phenomena is by stating, sometimes nature ain't so wonderful. Due to this grossly unfunny and grossly disliked, by rocks, circumstance, I missed out on almost all of the twenty minutes which was spent in that area by the two people.

By the time the young lady and her friend left me, a look at the sun told me that more than one third of my time as a rock was now gone. I now began to pay more attention to the rocks around me. Introducing myself to my fellow rocks I neglected to inform them of my circumstances, that I was rock for a day. Naturally they thought that I was one of them. It was a good thing the rocks didn't know I was not permanent because they let me in on some valuable information.

It seems that the rocks of the world have formed a fellowship. The idea of this rocky organization is to get the rocks of granite, marble and all other compositions together to join the revolt.

That's right, revolt.

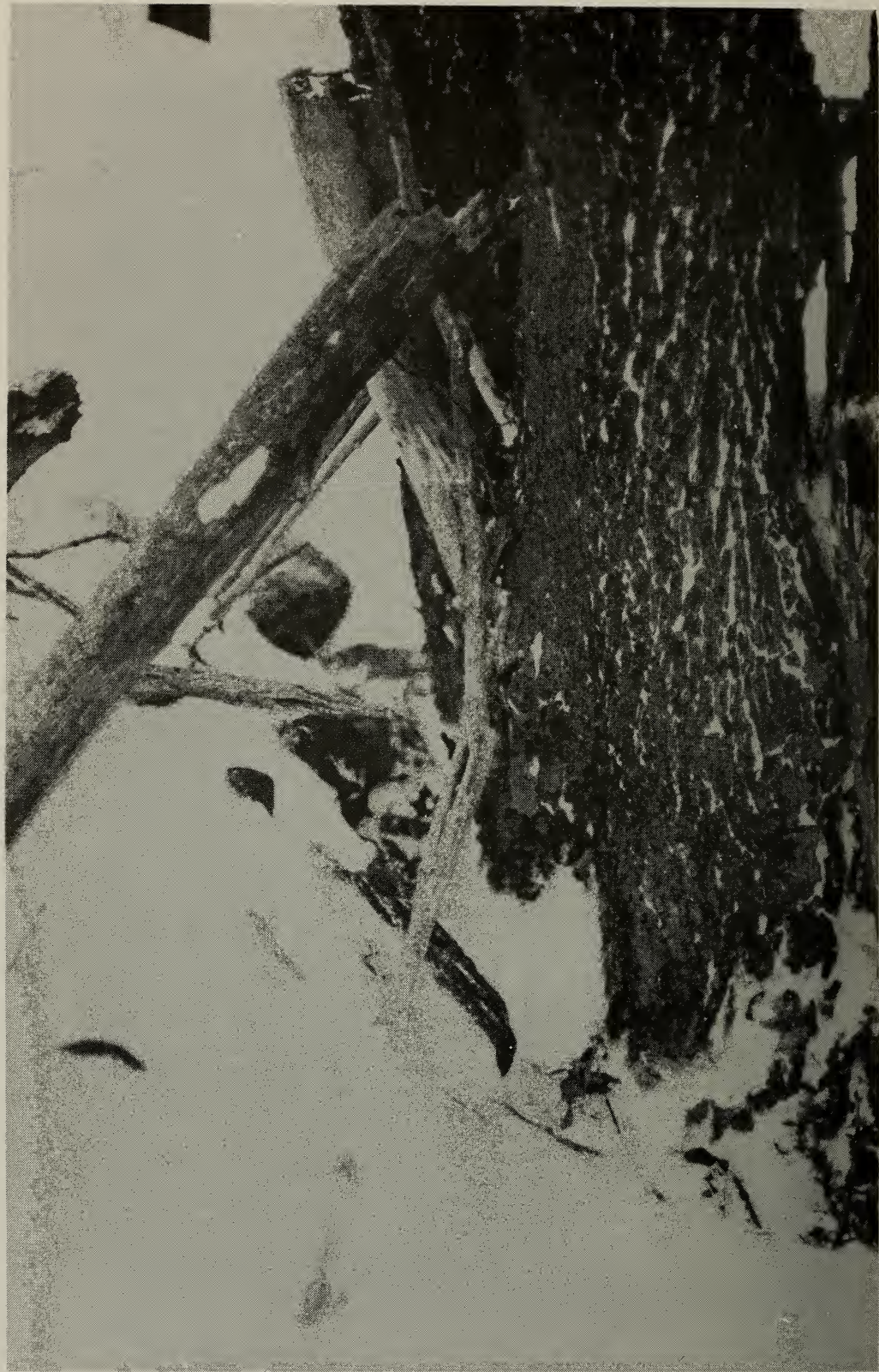
Once the rocks have banded together, they plan to take over. Rocks, as a whole, are disatisfied with world organization, with wars, with killing, with the distrust man has against his fellow-man, and against himself. Rocks, on the other hand, have no feelings, therefore they can and will trust whoever they elect as leader.

You know, they have a good idea. I mean, rocks can kill people, but how many people can kill rocks. Oh its true, you can pulverize rocks, but all that does is makes the rock more than what it was. No, the rocks have a good plan. They cannot lose.

In the eyes, so to speak, of the rocks, they cannot lose. Fortunately, I saw through their plans. As we, the rocks rapped, the full realization of their diabolical scheme began to cke its way into my human consciousness. All during our discourse I thought frantically for a way to stop this frightening thing, which the rocks were planning, from happening.

Then it dawned on me. There was a professor in mineralogy I remembered from my college days. As I recall he had made a prophesy to the world that the rocks would try to take over. In fact I remember the exact day that he made that prediction cause I was working for the Sure Fit Shoe Stores One In Every State Today The Country Tomorrow The World store and Professor Stone had come in to buy a brand new pair of white and black sneakers to go with his grey suit, the one he was wearing to the P.T.A. meeting. Of course, everyone called him a screwball, but now I knew, he knew. If we could only get hold of him, the professor. He must know a way to stop this sinister revolt of the rocks. But where is the professor now. Those were my thoughts as I lay there pretending to be all for the revolt.

by
William Roy



A Poem for June Fine
(flautist)

*Spastic
with fingers bent and crooked
with knuckles enlarged
her hands were those of an old witch.*

*She moved shy like as if
she wished to be unnoticed as if
to be out of your way I guess
not many people ever saw her
moving in a shadow so shy.*

*suddenly the room was a picture
Her wicked hand
reaching for
aglow with a Godly aura
a silver shining flute
leaning upright in a shaded corner.*

*One would have thought
She's moving it from her path
But Then
crooked hand clasp the flute
and the flute floated slowly to
tu her lips
shadow like—*

*deep notes came like mellowed comfort in darkness
ascending their way to laughter dancing
I melting, gazed upon my own hands
sculp like in their manliness of texture and complexion
of golden hair and fingers veined
wanting to apologize for their mutant quality*

*but her song heard me
and spoke to me saying*

you are forgiven

steve behrsing

Poem for Michael K.

*With each sound that came forth
from his mouth
Each down whisper that came forth
Every cry that begged understanding
Was passed through the delicate
structure of this man and released
through his hands.
And they leaped and flew; many times
almost fleeing except for the connection.
Slim and unscarred David fingers
danced for me, showing the beauty of
himself
Melted together in pure wax form, they
burst, budding and maybe knowledge,
maybe emotions would flow; and
this was life.
And I sat and I sit transfixed to the
display of a human fantasy.*

Mary Ann Graham



Big Day In Sector 12

Like a starving child nursing a sterile breast, the blazing sun sucked every drop of moisture from the earth. Vibrant fingers of heat danced toward the sky. Twisted, knarled edges and dwarfed pine trees dotted hillsides and valleys. Prune-like leaves, dried and shriveled by the sun, and golden pine needles crumbled when disturbed. The bleached soil, when trod upon, erupted in explosions of dust that rose a few feet in the air, then settled on all below.

Overlooking a valley checkered by dried rice patties sat a group of men protected from the sun by the lee side of their armored track. The torso of a black man scanning the valley with field glasses protruded from the command hatch. Next to him a large, black machine gun, fuming from the sun's heat, pointed at the valley.

Below, where the others ate in the shade, sat a young man, sleeves rolled to his shoulders, arms folded across his chest and a cigarette hanging limply from his lips. His legs were out-stretched and his back rested against a roadwheel of the track. A hat covered his eyes. Occasionally, he would lazily brush a hand across his face sending a group of flies pell-mell into flight. The drone of the flies save for the occasional conversation of the men was all to be heard.

The young man pushed his hat back from his eyes and sat upright. He came to his feet and gazed aimlessly in the opposite direction of the black man. He was of firm slender build with a pleasant but not uncommon face. His blond mustache, hazel eyes and wavy blond hair stood out strikingly against his bronzed skin. After stretching, he sat down, wiggled on the ground until he was comfortable and resumed his previous position.

The black man dropped the field glasses from his eyes.

"We been roastin our asses up here near three days and ain't nothin come of it. Them zips ain't nobody's fool. They know when things is too hot to be done. 'Sides, ain't nothin happened 'round here since the war and that were twenty years ago. That shit-head colonel of ours is always coming off with these asshole details. Who's he tryin to jive man? Ain't nothin gonna come of this: 'less maybe we sweat to death. Bullshit man, pure bullshit, that's what it is."

"Ya sarge, how about it? When we going to get off this damn hill?"

The young man crushed his cigarette on the ground. His men were getting restless. He felt much the same as they did.

He called to the black man. His voice was even and calm.

"Moses, we have it made up here. Nobody bothers us so..."

"Ya, I know. Shut the hell up and drop down a joint. That's all yar white bastards is good for; given orders and smokin my grass. I tell you what Sarge, If I..."

The hollow clink of metal against the side of the track and the report of a rifle sent Moses crashing to the inside of the cabin. The men looked like large, green snakes slithering for shelter under the track.

"You OK Moses?"

"My pants is wet!"

From the other wide of the valley came a shower of fire. The hill became a dust storm of earth and rocks.

The young sergeant crawled from under the track to where the men had been sitting. He poked his head around the rear of the track and jumped in the cabin. Moses was sitting on a bench along the wall, sweat pouring from his face.

"Where are the glasses?"

"Must have dropped them on top."

The sergeant moved under the open command hatch, slowly bringing his head eye level with the rim. The glasses lay beyond his reach near the edge of the track. In a sudden lunge he hooked his waist on the rim of the hatch and thrust out his right arm. From inside Moses heard a line of oaths. The sergeant dropped back into the cabin.

"Son of a bitch!"

The glasses had fallen from the side and rolled out of reach of the men below.

"I'll get em."

"Don't be an ass! I need you alive. Forget it! I'm going under with the others. Stay close to the gun."

He moved toward the door. Just as he was ready to jump out, another volley of fire smashed against the track. He hooked his right hand on the door frame and swung to the shelter of the lee side of the track and rejoined his men.

"Have you seen where it's coming from?"

One of the men pointed his rifle at a hill to the left end of the valley.

"Think I saw a reflection from over there."

The sergeant saw a cluster of large boulders and trees.

"Moses, about ten o'clock, half way up the hill is a bunch of rocks and trees. Find it and put twenty or thirty rounds in it."

"Right on, man."

The air became an ear-shattering explosion that lingered for seconds. Large brass casings bounced from the deck and rolled to the ground.

Once again the hill bristled with dust and fragments of rock. The men pressed closer to the ground.

"Looks like we found them Sarge. What the hell we gonna do now?"

It was not uncommon for the enemy to send out small patrols at night. Their missions were to observe movements. Unless they encountered a UN patrol, shots were seldom exchanged. This was the first daylight incident that he knew of. Reports had been filtering in that warned of large troop build-ups in the area. Perhaps the colonel was right. Maybe the North Koreans were planning an attack, or it might be just a brash attempt to string out the command. In either case it was up to his platoon to find out. His orders were clear. Any northern patrol was to be eliminated.

He gave the men their orders. They slithered from under the track and dashed through the rear door.

"Moses, start it up and head for the hill."

"Jesus Christ man, you lookin to get killed. You're nuts Sarge, really spaced out man."

Moses and the sergeant put their command helmets on, plugged them into the track's intercom and hust the hatches. The men sat on the benches along either wall. The engine started up with a blast of heat. The track became a sweat box lighted only by rays of sun entering through the periscopes hanging from the inner rims of the driver and command hatches.

The giant metal box began rumbling down the hill into the valley. The men inside were bounced up and down and knocked into each other as the track crawled over rocks and fell into shallow holes. From inside it sounded like a great coffee grinder munching at nuts and bolts. Bullets could be heard rhythmically clinking against the walls.

The sergeant looked through the periscope and saw a man jump from behind a rock. He sprang open the hatch above and swung the machine gun toward the boulders. The air came alive with a rhythmic series of explosions. The earth around the boulders exploded into a blinding dust cloud. Pieces of rock crumbled beneath the blasts of the gun. The men threw open the large cargo hatch above them and fired wildly into the rocks.

The sergeant had been involved in numerous actions. Each time his body bristled with fear and anticipation. Somehow this was different. His stomach was a knarled mass of nerves. He felt almost sick. His body felt the impact of each shot he fired.

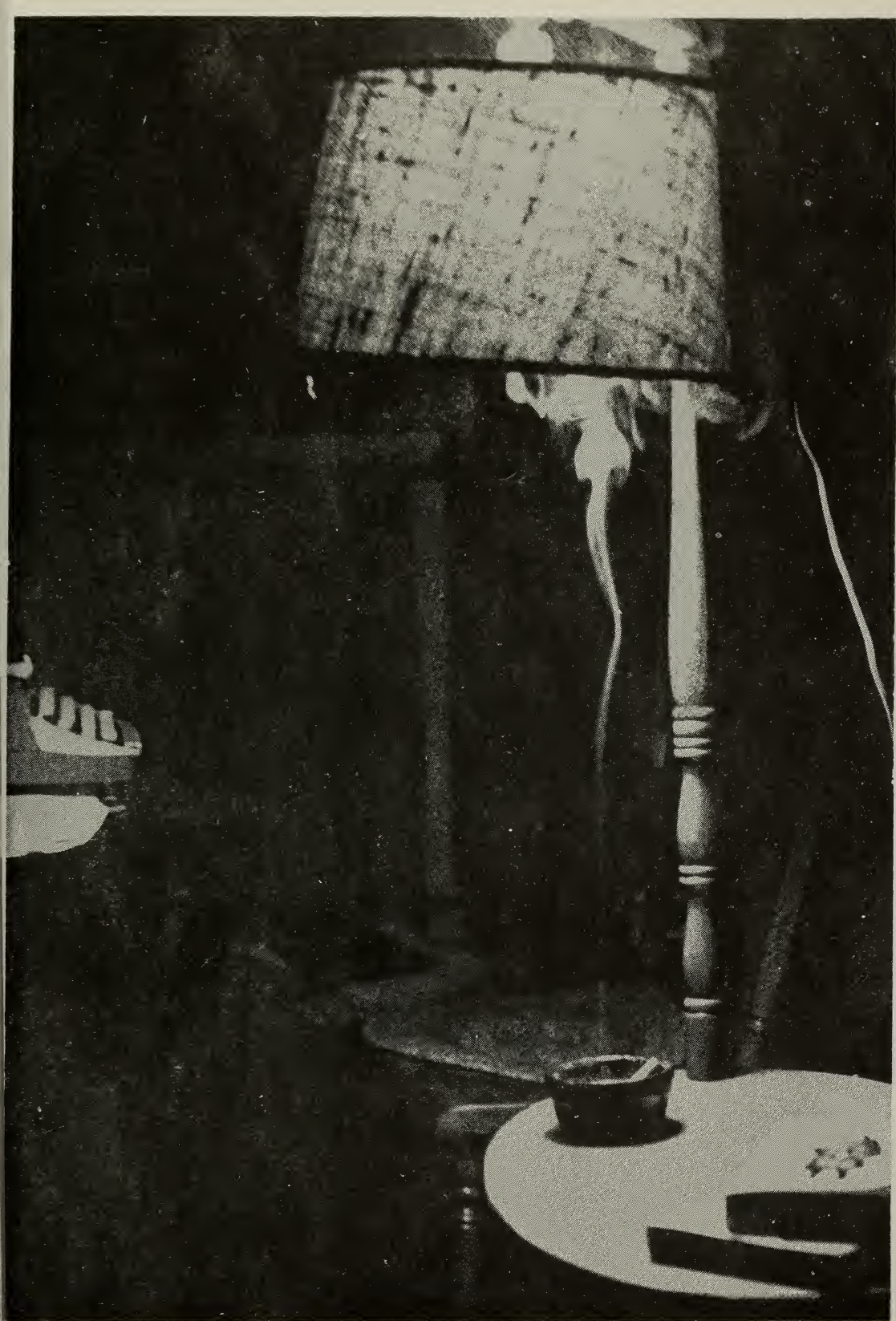
The track, like a great iron monster clawed at rocks and bushes as it climbed the hill. It came to an abrupt halt at the foot of the infested rock nest. The men jumped from the rear door finding shelter behind the closest rocks. The sergeant jumped under an overhang. He found two hand grenades on his belt, pulled the pins and thrust them skyward. The explosions sent pieces of debris into the air. The men, still firing, moved closer to the nest. The firing stopped and the men stood appalled at what they saw.

Five bodies lay twisted in grotesque positions. One was cut in half at the waist; the others lay with gaping holes pouring blood into the thirsty soil. In the nest were two more. One man, slumped over a rock, had his back blown open. His intestines dangled to the ground like a large snake slithering from a tree. The other lay face turned to the sky. Only the whites of his eyes shown. His jaw was blown away and blood ran over his silky blond hair. The men were blinded by the sun's reflection from the crossed rifles of U.S. infantry officer's insignia.

The men stood in disbelief. Not a sound could be heard save for the drone of the feasting flies.

by

C. Owen Baxter



*Nothing is what gets tailored now.
Once elbows, guitar, drippings and
Three-ring country clowning kept my tailor to his spasm.*

*For, nothing can't be scun, hardened, shoed, numbed,
Bruised, danced, crossed, tapped, embarrassed, or broken
in endeavor.*

*Nothing can't stagger or be swung around a stool.
Nothing can't be impatient on an escalator.*

*I was informed by Army doctors that all that's un-me
My anti-bodies won't allow.
(At present no proxys when you're a snowflake or a man.)*

*So nothing is what gets tailored now,
Bermudas in winter,
And its all a patient escalator ride
Murmured in the subjunctive mood.*

poet unknown

*Always wanted it
Never to do it
Talked
Listened
Asked away
Couldn't go away
Someday do
Together*

Rich Miller

*So what if I like Peter Nero and after seeing
Dave Brubeck and Jerry Mulligan, I'll never go
to another concert, jazz or otherwise.*

*So what if I don't practice my flute every day,
but I dream of playing one day like Paul Horne
or Herbie Mann when all the time wishing that
my parents made me sit at the piano each day
when I was young.*

*So what if all these scraps of paper with bits
of love verses, that when I wrote them, meant
so much, but amount to a cancelled Quiz Show
right now.*

*So what if my idea of Benj. F. Brown and Robert
Frost poetry don't quite make it with a Creative
Writing teacher who digs Richard Brautigan and
Jack Ready. I'm not trying to impress anyone and
neither is he.*

*And so what if I'm racking my brains out going to
school, and every day my hands shake a little more
and I'm gonna major in Music and write my thesis
on Franz Liszt when all I really want is to have
babies and re-do furniture.*

Mary Ann Graham

*Born from the ambiguities of life
I have lived in the hearts and minds
of men since the birth of time*

*But few have recognized me
and those who have
had little feeling for my needs*

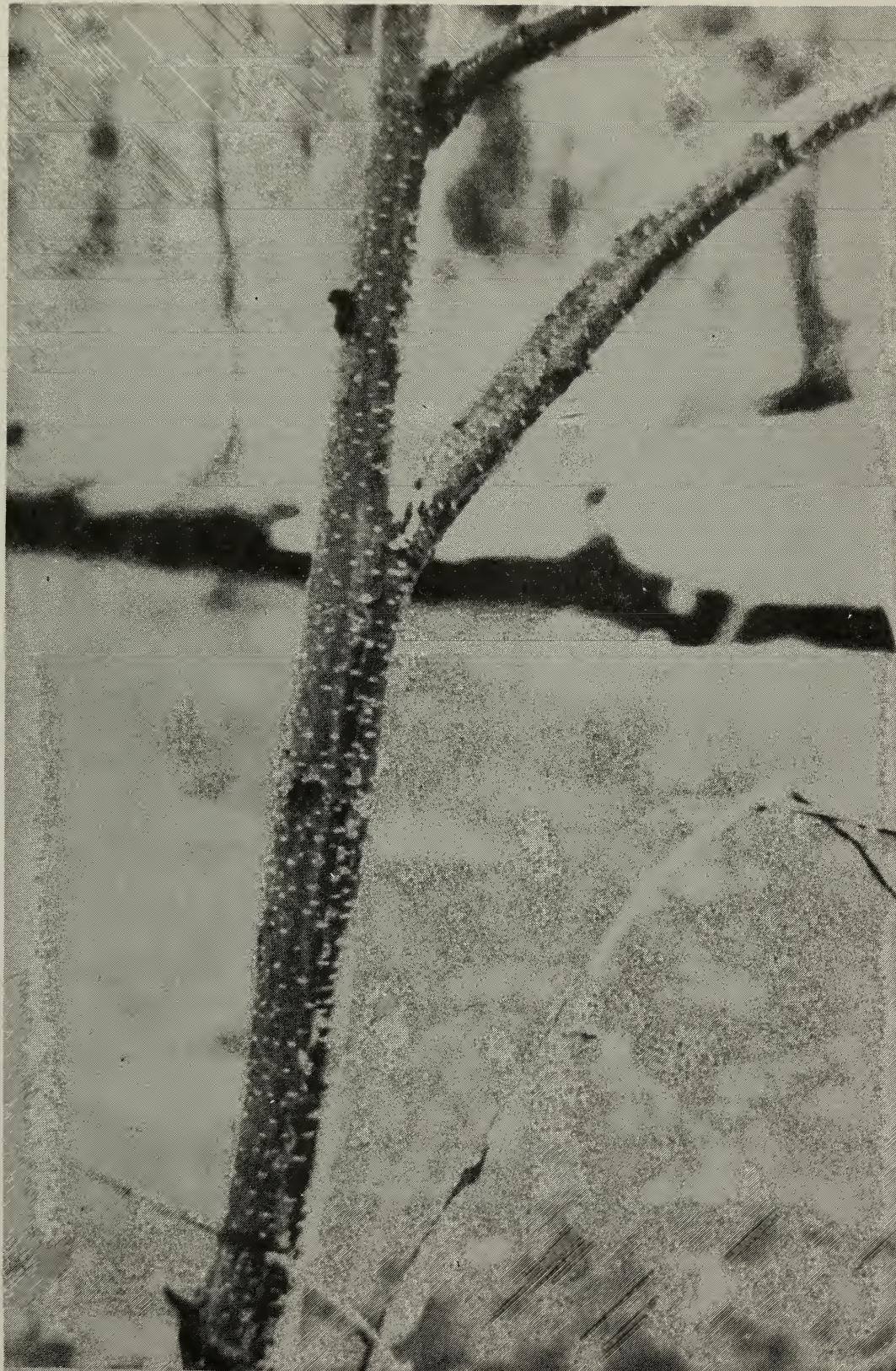
*As the whore who cares little
the form or manner of the act
Expecting only just payment in return
and destroying those who refuse*

*I too care not who desires or commands
my affections
But in finality
I demand the consideration of your understanding*

*And for you who have dared
classify me and label me
In your frustration
I will search you out
reveal you for what you are
and return you to the obscurity
of your own meager existence*

*And in my life, I am rich
in the destruction of those fools
who sought to rip me open, tear me apart
examine my guts, and destroy me
For what I am*

Richard R. Harris



TABOR'S STONE

It was dawn on the island, and the only sound Tabor could hear was the wash of the ocean on the beach. Tabor loved the music of the morning, and the feel of the sand between his toes. But there was no smile on his face today. He wondered if he would ever smile again, or at least until the drawings were over.

Beach stones were lucky, he was told, and he knew that he would not leave the beach until he found a stone. He kicked the sand around with his foot, turning over one stone after another, but none of the stones seemed suitable, until he came across a stone with a red stripe around it.

"Are you a lucky stone?" he asked. "You are a young stone, not yet rounded by the waters, but pointed and sharp like the mountains on the island."

He sat down on the beach, and closed his hand tightly around the stone. It was almost an hour later when Tabor saw a friend appear on the horizon. He waited until he could see him better and then spoke. "We have been friends for many years. I know how many. Sixteen. They taught me how to count, and made me fear each birthday as it passed. I remember when the drawings were just a thought which had very little meaning, and now, it has become my sadness."

Tabor raised his feet, and felt the warmth of the sun on his soles. He opened his hand to look again at the stone which he had picked. The sight of his deadly white fingers took the breath from his body and the warmth from his soul. The stone rolled off his palm and dropped to the beach. A cloud covered the sun, and Tabor felt fear pushing through his veins.

Tabor's mother waited patiently for him. She knew that his stone would be chosen with care. She felt a twinge of guilt as she saw him coming towards the house; Tabor was her favorite out of all of her sons. If there was a chore to be done, or a kind word to be given, it was always Tabor who was there first.

"Have you chosen your stone, my son?" she said as Tabor walked through the doorway.

"Yes"

"You should bring it in before long. They'll put one in for you if you don't, and the stones they use aren't lucky."

Tabor knew that his stone must be registered in the capitol city of Polk, before his sixteenth birthday. It was a full days walk to Polk City, and his birthday was in only four days.

"Let me see your stone", his mother said.

Tabor saw a somewhat cheerful expression disappear from his mother's face, as he opened his hand. The wrinkles on her face showed the strain of her sixth drawing. Putting his hand to her face, he could feel the smoothness of her age. This was an intimacy which she could not bear, and the tears which she had held back, so valiantly, began to flow.

Tabor stopped at the doorway before leaving for Polk City. He turned and smiled at his mother. "You don't have to watch me go. I'll be back before you know it."

He walked slowly down the paths through the village. He breathed deeply, savoring the rich aroma of the morning meals which were being prepared. All through the city, the people wished him good-luck, and hoped they would see him soon. There were very few in the village who didn't like Tabor, and some would much rather their own son get picked than to see Tabor's stone drawn.

As Tabor reached the top of Massa Peak, he turned to look down at his village. He came to this spot often, to look at his village and the ocean. It looked more beautiful than it had ever looked before. A warm breeze blew his hair in front of his eyes, and as he pushed it aside. He smudged a tear into his cheek.

At the base of the hill, there was a fork in the road. One road led to Polk, while the other to Wai and a few other coastal villages. He could see a figure coming down the coastal road. The figure waved his arms, so Tabor decided to wait. As the figure got closer, Tabor could tell that it was a boy about his own age.

"Are you going to Polk?" the boy asked.

"Yes."

"Me too. I'm in the drawing this year. Are you?" "Yes."

"I wanted to volunteer, but my family wouldn't let me."

"You mean that you wanted to be picked?"

"Sure. Do you know all the things you get if you can evade the guards?"

He continued before Tabor could respond.

"You get to be a high-ranking officer in the guards, and you get to live in a big house at East Bay, and I think it's right next to the president's house, and you get all the money that you'll ever need, and everybody respects you, and all the women..."

"How do you know all this?", Tabor asked.

"I heard it from the president himself. Each year he adds more money to the prize."

"What good is it? Nobody has ever lived through the hunt, and there have been many who volunteered."

"That's because none of them ever knew what they were doing. They'd go off blindly into the woods, thinking that their skill alone could save them. Not one of them ever had the slightest idea of where they were going."

"And you would?"

"Do you see this? It's a map of the island. Each of the X's is a good hiding place. There are surely enough places to hide for the three days. One place would be enough."

"But how do you know that it's the same island as the hunt?"

"I got it from a very reliable source. I have no doubt as to this being the map of the correct island."

"Well, even if it is a map of the island, and even if you do know all of the hiding places, how do you know that you won't get caught going back to the ship?"

"You don't have to worry about getting back to the ship. As soon as the three days have passed, they cannot kill you. All you have to do is walk back to the ship and collect the rewards."

"I don't think I'd have much use for the money, and I know I wouldn't want to be in the guards, but the house at East Bay sounds good. My family would love it there."

"Then, why don't you volunteer, and I'll give you the map. When you get the rewards, you can have everything except half of the money, which would be my payment for the map. If you don't make it, you owe me nothing."

"Thank you, but I don't think the rewards are worth it anyway."

"I think it's worth the risk."

"Then, why don't you volunteer? I'll go to your village, and tell them that you were picked. You can keep all of the rewards."

"No, my family would find out. My uncle is..." The boy stopped, realizing that he should say no more. They walked the rest of the way in silence.

Tabor was overwhelmed at the sight of the buildings in Polk. They were nothing like the brown, single-story dwellings in Clish, but rather, they were brightly-colored, multi-storied, buildings, which even had windows and doors.

Tabor's traveling companion knew the city well, and it was only a short time before they were standing in front of a grey structure. Without reading the sign, Tabor knew that this was the registration building. Once again, the boy led the way. They went down a long corridor, which was plastered with pictures of President Ricar Onyx, and arrived in the office of the registrar of stones. A small counter separated the boys from an even smaller clerk. The clerk shuffled up to the counter, took Tabor's stone, and began filling out a form.

"Name?" the clerk asked.

"Tabor."

"Full name?"

"Tabor Himara."

"Village?"

"Clish."

"Sign here", the clerk said as he passed a paper to Tabor.

"Are you going to be present for the drawings?", he asked Tabor.

Tabor nodded affirmatively.

"You're lucky", the clerk continued, "Your birthday is the day before the drawings. Some of the others have to wait for months, and they constantly worry about having picked an unlucky stone."

"Where is your stone?", the clerk asked the other boy.

"I've already brought my stone in. My name's Rob Groote."

Tabor heard Rob say his name as he left the office.

"I'm from the village of Wai", Rob continued.

The clerk nodded and went back to his desk. Tabor was waiting for Rob in front of the building. When Rob had left the office, the clerk looked to the bowl marked "Wai". He knew that his nephew's stone was in that bowl.

"This is the place I was telling you about", Rob said to Tabor. "You can stay here for free as long as you are in the drawings."

It was the day of the drawings, and the sun was directly overhead when the doors of the registry building opened. Two men began bringing out tables and lined them up. Tabor looked around, but couldn't see Rob. He thought that it was odd that Rob should be missing. This must be one of his favorite events. A large crowd began to gather, and Tabor decided to get as close as possible. As he got to the first table, the clerk from the registration building arrived. He had a single white bowl in his hand. Tabor didn't know much about the drawings, but he did remember hearing stories about the fantastically lucky red stone, which represented his district. The mumblings of the crowd, which had gathered ceased, when a figure appeared at the registry doorway. Even before it was announced, the people knew that it was President Onyx. He walked to the table; followed by four members of his famed, "Black and Grey" guards. Another figure appeared in the doorway. It was the official record-keeper. A small desk was brought out and placed behind the tables. The record-keeper opened his book on the table, and nodded to the registration clerk. The drawings were about to begin.

The clerk raised the bowl above the president's head. Tabor was numb; he couldn't believe that the moment had arrived. The president reached into the bowl. The heads of the crowd followed the president's hand, as he dwirled the rocks around in the bowl. Tabor closed his eyes. He heard the disbelieving gasps of the crowd; the red stone had been chosen. Tabor spotted a water fountain across the street. He walked stiffly to the fountain and found a seat between two older citizens.

"What district?", the oldest looking asked.

"The Outer Ring." Tabor said hypnotically.

"What's that?", another elder asked.

"Outer Ring", the oldest replied. "Had to get picked sometime. Didn't think I'd ever see the day though."

Tabor sat; wishing he could stop the thoughts he was thinking. The luck of the outer ring had been broken.

The bowl containing the village rocks of the Outer Ring were brought to the table. Nobody could remember what any of the rocks looked like, and it wasn't until the clerk looked up the stone chosen did anyone know the results.

"It is the village of Wai", someone shouted to the people at the fountain.

"Wai", Tabor said. "Did you hear that? It is Wai. I'm free. I can go home."

Tabor saw Rob coming to the square.

"Have the drawings begun?"

"Yes, Tabor answered. They picked the Outer Ring, and then, the village of Wai."

"Wai?", Rob said questioningly. "Have they picked the stone from Wai, yet?"

"I don't know. I think they've got the bowl out now."

"Is this a joke?", the president asked.

"No, sir", the clerk said. "There were no boys of that age in the village this year."

"What is the law?", the president asked his record-keeper.

"There is none, sir. There is no precedent."

"Then", the president continued. Make a note that in this event, another stone from the same district shall be drawn."

The bowl of the Outer Ring was again brought forward.

"Mr. Knox", the president again spoke to the cler, "are you positive that there are none of the age..."

"If you wish, I'll bring out the birth records", Knox said.

"No, if you are positive, I believe you."

The clerk let out a deep sigh; relieved that the president had not called his bluff.

Neither Tabor nor Rob could hear what was going on, but Tabor's ears twinged when he heard the name 'Clish' called. He rushed into the crowd.

"What's going on?", he asked.

"Nobody sixteen years old in Wai. Had to pick another village. Clish, I think."

"Tabor Himara", the clerk shouted. "Is Tabor Himara present?"

Tabor's hands dangled at his sides. He tried to speak, but the words were chained.

"Notify the Village of Clish that Tabor Himara has been chosen."

"Here he is", Rob shouted. "This is Tabor Himara. Here he is."

Rob put his map in Tabor's hand, and said, "Good luck. And don't forget, fifty-fifty if you make it."

Two of the guards came over to Tabor, and brought him to the president. The people crowded around trying to get a better look at him. Tabor could hear his name being whispered in the crowd.

"Tabor Himara", the president said, "you look like a fine lad. Good luck."

"Come Tabor", Knox said, "there are a few things we must do before you leave for the island."

Four trucks drove quietly down the only paved road on the island. The road began at the president's retreat in East Bay, passed through the capitol, and ended at the western port of Caldire. The first truck in the entourage contained the president, the record-keeper, the registration clerk, and a representative of the islands sole newspaper, The Poked Voice. The second and fourth trucks held the entire complement of the Black and Greys, except for the three who guarded Tabor, in the third truck.

It was after dark when they arrived in the port city. The blood hungry and the sympathetic had gathered at the dock. Longboats were used to transport the men to the presidential yacht, and once on board, Tabor was brought below and placed in a security cabin. He spent an hour looking at the map that Rob had given to him. But only his eyes were on the map; his mind and thoughts were on the beach in Clish. He wasn't afraid to die, but was afraid that there would never be another beach like Clish, or another woman like his mother. The door to Tabor's cabin was unlocked and Mr. Knox came in.

"Hello Tabor", he said as he sat down next to him.

"Hello."

"Tabor, I want to talk to you about the drawing. I'd like to thank you for not saying anything about..."

"Oh, that's alright", Tabor interrupted. "I know that it's not your fault I was picked. I had a good of a chance as anyone else."

"Well, that's what I want to tell you. You see, my nephew..."

"Mr. Knox", the guard called "We're putting into port."

"Tabor", Knox whispered. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Well..."

"It will be just between you and me. You have my word."

"Could you bring this map to my mother? Ask her to bring it to the next drawing. Maybe it will help somebody."

"Yes, Tabor, you have my word."

Tabor looked up the steps which led to the main deck. The president was at the top, looking down at him. With the sun at the president's back, his figure was ghostly black; an executioner peering into the grave.

"Go with Knox", the president told Tabor. "He will give you everything you need for the test."

Tabor followed Knox down the gangplank, and onto the beach. There were no sounds on the island; no signs of life. The beach was stained with the blood from previous tests. He wondered if he, too, would add some of his blood to this human picture.

"Here are enough provisions for you for four days on the island", Knox said to Tabor. "You may also take your pick of any of these weapons, but you may only pick one."

Tabor's decision was just like the one at Clish. He hoped that his choice would be a better one than before. Spread out on the beach, there was; a rifle, with forty rounds of ammunition; a bow and two quivers of arrows; a large hunting knife; and a sling-shot with a generous supply of metal balls. He looked at the rifle, but decided that it would be no good; he would be discovered after his first shot. The bow would give him as much killing power, but it would be much too awkward in the thick undergrowth.

"The sling-shot", he thought aloud. "Yes, I choose the sling-shot."

Mr. Knox looked up to the boat's deck. It was against the rules of the hunt for any of the guards to see what their victim had chosen, or to see what direction he went into the forest. But Mr. Knox had another reason for his cautiousness.

"Take the knife too", he said to Tabor. "The bow and arrow too, if you wish. Take them all; but go quickly before anyone finds out."

"What do you mean? Why?"

"You'll have a day's head start before the guards begin to look for you. There's an excellent spot on the other side of the island. There are many places to hide."

"Yes, I know. I had a map."

"Go, then, and good luck."

With the guidance of his friend, the sun, Tabor reached the far side of the island. Tabor didn't trust Knox, nor the advice which he had given to him. He didn't intend to hide on the far side of the island but had decided to set a few traps. He hoped that the guards would be tricked into thinking that he was hiding here. He picked a spot which had been scuffed with the marks of previous hunts. He positioned his rifle in the "V" of the branches of a tree stuffing the barrel with small stones and dirt, he set the trigger with a stick of wood. The slightest movement would now cause it to fire. He hoped that the explosion would rid him of a few guards.

Retracing his steps, he arrived once more at the ship. There was a spot which had been marked on the map, which was close enough for him to see the ship at all times. He figured that hiding right under their noses would be the best thing to do. His friend sat at the edge of the ocean, and along with Tabor, watched the activity on the ship. There were only two figures on the deck; the president and the clerk.

"Mr. President", Knox said. There is something I've wanted to tell you. It's about the drawings. Well, I had a nephew...and...well, he was from Wai. I know that I shouldn't have taken his stone out, but he was the only one from the village."

"You mean that your nephew should be out there, and not that other boy?"

"He's the only nephew I have, Mr. President."

"That's beautiful, Mr. Knox. I didn't think you had it in you. Why didn't you tell me about this earlier. He wouldn't have had to be in the drawing."

"He's a funny kid.. He wanted to volunteer. I tried to convince him of how hopeless his chances were."

The president and Knox began to laugh.

"You should've seen his face when Wai was called", Knox laughed. "He was so damned scared; I knew then that he had been all talk."

"Wake me when it is time", Tabor told his friend.

The sun nodded, and slowly laid down in his watery bed.

"I wonder what Mr. Knox and the president are talking about?" Tabor asked himself.

"Knox is probably telling him about where I'm hiding. But then again it's good that he does. The guards will be swarming all over the far side of the island."

Tabor was awake long before his friend. There was a lot of activity on the ship. The guards were getting ready to start the hunt. Tabor felt unbelievably safe. It was just as if he were a member of the guards. He imagined how scared he would have been had he stayed on the far side of the island. He knew that his fear would have been his worst enemy. Tabor greeted the sun as it appeared. He was in high spirits. Raising his feet, he said, "Warm my feet, my friend. It won't be long before we're together at Clish again." Tabor thought for a moment and suddenly became quite elated. "No, my friend. We shall not meet at Clish, but rather the house at East Bay."

The guards began to split up into groups. With six or seven to a group, they all went into the woods in different directions. He could see glimpses of some of the groups every now and then as they pushed through the brush. Tabor sat up quickly as he saw the heads of a few guards, coming in his direction. They were walking on the beach, but didn't seem to be looking for anyone.

"Hey", cried one of the guards, pointing to Tabor's perch. "There's a nice place to rest for a while."

"Rest", said another. "We just started, and already you're looking to rest. Let's at least get out of sight of the ship. There's a nice cove around the bend. We stayed there last year for the three days. It's a perfect place to swim."

A first year member of the guards spoke, "But, what about the hunt? Aren't we going to look for the boy?"

The guards broke out with laughter.

"That's a good one", one of the seasoned guards said. "Didja hear that; he thinks we're going to hunt for the kid. The last time we seriously looked for one of the victims, half the company got lost. There are only a few of us who really know the island."

Tabor tried to hear the guards, but couldn't quite make out what they were saying. Tabor had ducked when he saw the guard pointing to his hiding place, and he was scared for the first time since he had arrived at his look-out position. He didn't dare look over the edge of his cliff, for fear of being detected; yet he had to know what the guards were doing. He pulled a leaf off of a tree. It was just like the leaves his mother used to wrap a roast before cooking it. He pushed two holes through it, and used it as a mask. Holding the leave at the stem, and looking through his peep holes, he crawled to the edge of the cliff. Had the rest of his body been painted green, he would have resembled a giant preying mantis. The guards had gone.

The morning of the third day had finally arrived, and Tabor saw a few of the guards returning to the ship. He had only to wait for just a few more hours, and then he would be free; and rich. The guards who had walked by him earlier were also returning. Once again the guard pointed to the spot where Tabor was hiding.

"I'm going up there", he said. "I'll bet it's really beautiful."

"Oh, go on then. You won't be happy until you do. We're going back to the ship. I'm dying to get a decent meal again."

The guard began to climb.

"I'll see you back at the ship", he called out.

Tabor watched as the guard got closer and closer. He picked up his knife; the sweat of his hand made the handle slippery. He crawled to a large rock, and hid behind it. The sound of the guard's clawing and scratching got louder. As Tabor looked over the rock, he could see the guard's hand come into view. In front of the guard's hand, Tabor spotted his sling-shot. He froze as the guard's hand fell on it. But the guard was searching for something which he could hold on to, and the sling-shot was not it. When he was finally standing at the top of the cliff, he turned his back to Tabor and called out to his friends. But the others didn't answer him. He sat down on the edge of the cliff.

"Just like at Massa Peak", he said to himself.

When Tabor heard what the guard had said, he felt like running out and telling the guard that he too, used to sit on Massa Peak. But just as he stood up, the guard stood also. Instinctively, Tabor dropped to the ground. The guard looked around; trying to find a rock to scale into the ocean. He picked up one stone after another and finally found one which suited him. But something else caught his eye; Tabor's sling-shot. He picked it up, looked at it, and then looked around. He started walking towards the rock where Tabor was hiding. Just before he reached the rock, Tabor jumped up.

"Don't shoot", he pleaded. "I'm from Clish too."

The guard raised his gun, but before he could fire, Tabor leaped at him. The momentum of Tabor's body pulled the guard over backwards, and he stared at the sky in horror as he felt Tabor's blade at his throat.

"If you make a move, I'll cut off your tongue at the base", Tabor said in a strained voice.

The guard nodded carefully. Tabor looked down at the ship. He was relieved to see that nobody had heard or seen the scuffle. It was a brief encounter, but Tabor was exhausted. He didn't move, waiting until his body had regained strength. The pressure of the sharp blade on the guard's throat had made a small cut. Tabor wiped some of the blood which trickled down the guard's throat with a finger. He put his bloodied finger in front of the guard's eyes.

"Don't make a sound", Tabor said.

The guard looked at the blood and swallowed gently. Tabor tied the guard to a tree with a few strong vines. He stuffed the guard's mouth full of leaves, securing them with, yet, another vine.

"If you try hard to break free, it should take you a few hours. You may eat the leaves if you wish; I don't think any of them are poison. Anyway, I'll be safe by the time you can shout for help."

"Here he comes", the clerk cried, as he pointed to the boy coming down the beach. "Here comes Tabor."

"Where is the newspaperman?", the president asked.

"He's down below."

"Make sure that he stays there", the president continued.

Two of the presidents men accompanied the president down the beach to meet Tabor. Tabor saw them coming, but he couldn't bring himself to smile. He had almost killed another, he thought. And what was worse was that he was from the same village.

The ship pulled into the port city of Caldire, and once again the same group had gathered. As the president came to the edge of the deck. He raised his hands.

"Once again", he spoke to the crowd. "The guards have returned victorious. Tabor Himara was caught and killed during the second day of the hunt. Tabor's family has my deepest sympathy, but I hope they will be pleased to know that their son died in service to his country."

The crowd was not shocked at the outcome; they knew the skill of the guards.

BY RICHARD CARON



ETERNITY

The loud thud of the dirt hitting my roof seemed to be lighter now. All was so quiet except for that noise. I could hear in the far distance someone playing taps. It was such a sad melody, I never did want it played at my funeral.

All was quiet, so quiet I could hear the dead breathe. My mind willed my body to move – it would not obey. I could sense the cold and stiff casing which my mind had occupied. With only my mind to interpret what was happening to my body, I was left without a sense of time, depth, or feeling.

The sense of decay had taken over my body. I was slowly deteriorating and nothing could stop it.

The earth is sinking around me. I could sense life. It seemed to be right next to me. My body, it's being swallowed by the creatures of the ground!.

Oh God – but what God? Would a God let me lie here and know I'm decaying, only to be a mind in the dirt? Will I be like this forever? Oh lonesomeness. It's hell, IT IS HELL! My mind screams out – no one answers. The worms are feasting – no one cares. The knowledge of five decades is buried – no one wants it.

Oh lonesome, lonesome hell.

Penny Fisher

Emily Dickinson is not an unknown
Poet. Our apologies. Eds.

*There came a wind like a bugle--
It quivered through the grass
And a green chill upon the hear*

*There came a wind like a bugle--
It quivered through the grass
And a green chill upon the heat
So ominous did pass
We barred the windows and the doors
As from an emerald ghost--
The doom's electric moccasin
That very instant passed--
On a strange mob of panting trees
And fences fled away
and rivers where the houses ran
Those looked that lived--that day--
The bell within the steeple wild
The flying tidings told--
How much can come
And how much can go,
And yet abide the world!*

Emily Dickinson is not an unknown poet unknown
Poet. Our apologies. Eds./

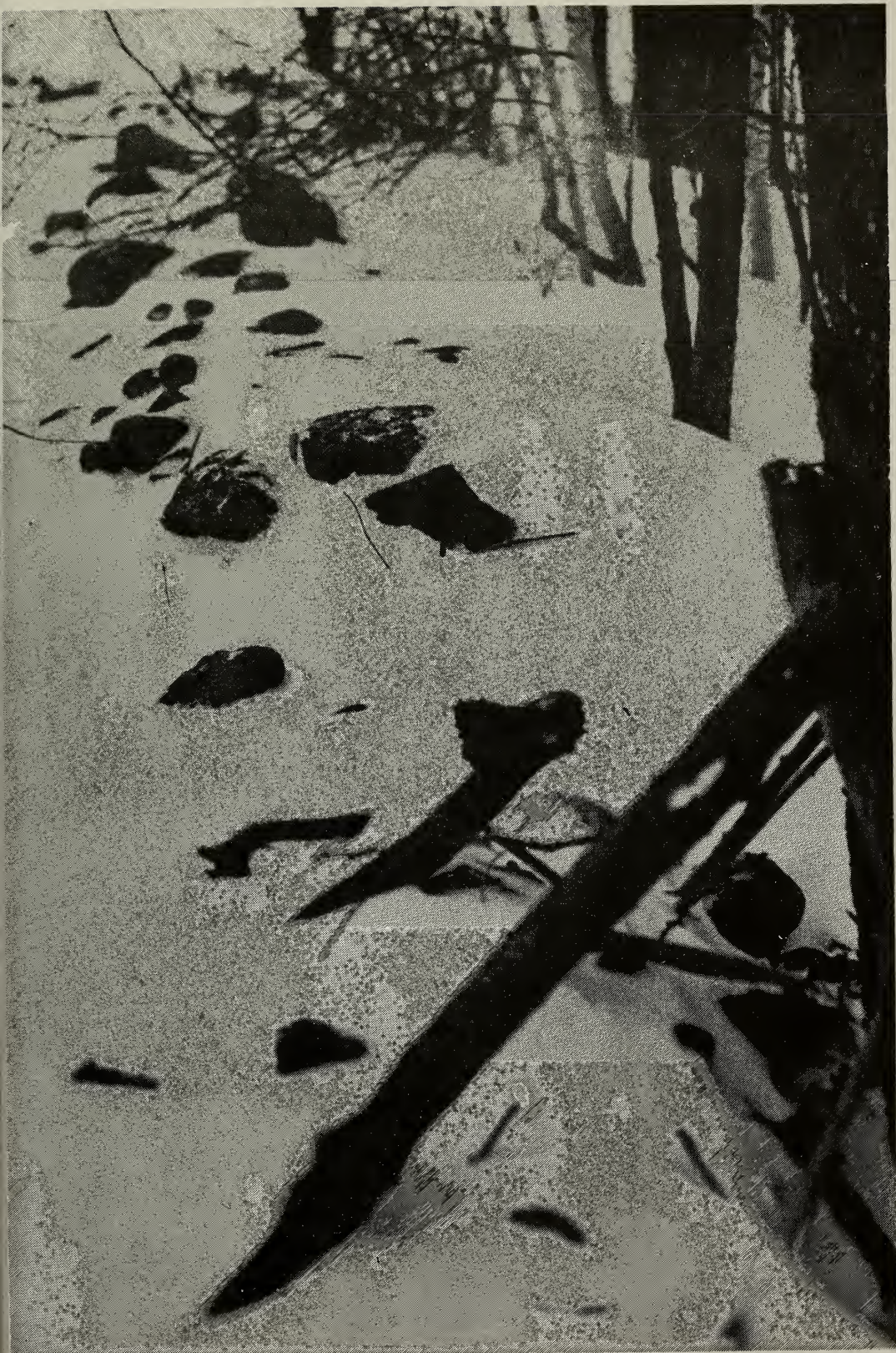
*Watching him,
near the waters edge.
He was playing with a leaf that had
floated into the shore.
He was trying to coax a duck to come
closer to him.
I watched the ripples float off the ducks
body, they slooped into the shore,
to where he was standing,
His feet were shoveling the sand
into the water.
The sand trickled down off his foot,
spilling a film over the water.
A sparkling film, was all he left behind.*

Suzuki

Penetration

the frozen river wove suspended
through the shore stones down
to the plate glass lake
remaining as was above
till the stone came
what could have been
a burning arrow into canvas
or for real the stone
the stone through the glass
the dust falling within the frame
like people on a tipped ship's deck
scream or far beyond real scream
the stone cra
cracked
Slight
obliterating what substance
generates light
leaving
a non-substance night echoing
if it would
wrecked trees and suspended tributaries
which
of the potential flow
a functional part
like the electron
minus that we named it
of the no-atom
was the hypothesis
which proven true
would have altered
the barrenness—
as a diminishing bubble
POPS through the point
where we can't go
the sun would have come
from the ocean
after night
but didn't
leaving
resultingly
the final eyes closed
unreachably gone
within the vacant firmament
of the disbelief night black
as the music
the she voice sang
no, it is not
no, it never was
leaving
knowing full the history
the standing on the serene sands
with ten million years of teeth
sunk deep in the iron bit
buried beneath
the being within fisted
and frantic and screaming
and still not squeaking
the hinge or cracking open
the grown-in door

steve behrsing



BARNEY

Barney was a magnificent steed. He was jet black with a solitary white diamond on his forehead. His coat glistened as every sinew in his muscular body quivered, and his hoofs must have spanned the diameter of at least fourteen inches. Any farmer would have been proud to own Barney—reputations were decided by one's choice of horse flesh.

"KUT—TEM SANOMA PIT—SIN GOOT HOSSES IM PIE—YINK" bragged father to a neighbor in his best broken English. It made me all the prouder seeing father so inflated with pride. And Barney was valuable too. This I positively knew because I overheard father tell the neighbor about how he managed to jew the "KUT—TEM SANOMA PITS" down to thirty five and that no "SANOMA PITS" better offer less than one hundred fifty or he could go to "HELLVETI". I had never heard of so much as a hundred fifty!

I was tortured by boyhood impatience as I waited for the time to come when I could hold the reins and put this marvelous beast through his paces. I used to sit on an apple box at Barney's stall watching him for hours as he munched on hay and swished flies with his long black tail. I patiently contented myself with getting to know Barney personally. I would sneak him an apple unbeknownst to father, and I even taught him to nuzzle a cube of sugar from my shirt pocket with his silken nose. I used to voluntarily keep his harness shined hoping to demonstrate to father that I was old enough to assume a man's responsibility. And when it was time to leave Barney, I would give him a proud pat on the rump just as I had seen father do so often.

My heart burst with pride the day my father assigned me full responsibility of caring for Barney. I carefully measured out the exact amount of oats as mandated by father, and always made sure Barney did not want for water. Carrying water to him was my most difficult chore. I had to use a short hold on the long wooden pump handle on the up stroke, and kind of work my hands back toward the end of the handle on the down stroke to get enough leverage to work the pump. It was some distance from the well, and the bucket was far too large. I would grip the pail with both hands and proceed with short jerky steps as the bucket gouged my shins and thoroughly sloshed me with water. I must have carried two buckets full for every one I got into Barney. But complaining was unthinkable lest I would lose the privilege of caring for my charge.

Harnessing Barney required some youthful ingenuity. I would stand on a box to collar and harness him, and when I was about to bridle him, Barney would lower his head gently and accept the bit as if he understood my predicament. Then he would let out a powerful snort from his nostrils that always made me jump fearfully because he sounded like some legendary monster from a far-away land that I had read about in a fairy tale.

Intuitively, he was prepared for an arduous day's work as I hitched him to the implement of the day. I never considered working the fields with Barney as a chore; not with the spirit he showed. I really never had to tell Barney anything. He always knew how the work should go, and he seemed to be happy that I would be along for the ride. At the end of a day's work, I would ride him home bareback. Then he became the fiery stallion carrying me to battle, or the swift cavalry pony in hot pursuit of the Indians. Occasionally, I would intertwine my bare toes in his mane, lie back on his broad rump and doze off, awakening on feeling the motion stop as Barney arrived in his stall. It was not considered a productive day if Barney failed to work up a thick white lather all over his shiny body.

This was part of the problem. The heavier the work, the more he felt compelled to try. Barney would heave and strain, never giving up until the work was proceeding in appropriate rhythm. And all his mighty efforts gave rise to another more serious problem. Barney was incredibly flatulent!

To my father, this was a good omen, and he would recite an ancient folk saying, that I shall, with all due apologies, translate verbatim. "A farting horse never tires," went the saying, and Barney certainly epitomized the truth of that particular statement. The greater the challenge, the more he tried, and the more he tried, the more flatulent he became until some sort of frenetic rhythm occurred, much to the glee of my father, and occasionally to my personal embarrassment.

Once in a while, it was necessary to drive Barney past the neighbors who had a very pretty daughter. In the privacy of our own fields, I was unconcerned by Barney's impropriety, but driving him past the neighbor's house certainly aroused all kinds of apprehensions within me. Since I did not want to insult the neighbors, I desperately tried to anticipate Barney's next fart, and upon seeing his tail rise, I would reach my foot out from the wagon seat and press his tail down hoping to contain him. Of course his intestinal pressure inevitably exceeded the strength of my foot, and nature would win out in one colossal THRRRRRRRP!!!!

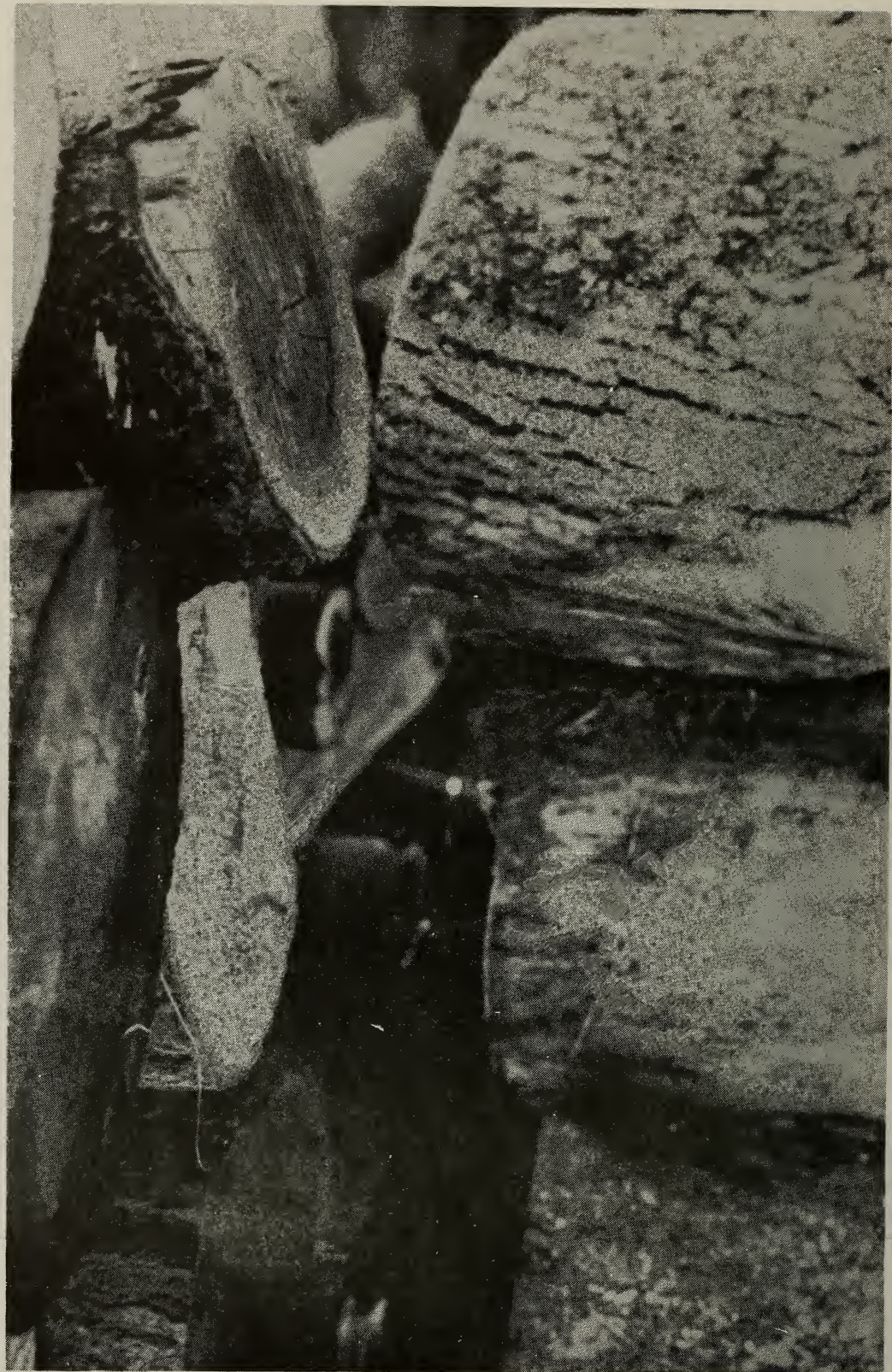
The winter I was allowed to join the men in the annual harvest of ice was a monumental one. As a twelve year old, I had finally been admitted to official manhood, and my job was to guide Barney from the lake to the ice house at the farm, a distance of some three miles. I could tell Barney was proud of his new winter shoes by his confident stance on the ice. He would snort with excitement as the men loaded the sledge with the huge rectangular cubes. He anxiously awaited the chance to show off his magnificent animal strength. The trip home was an incongruous mixture of flying snow and flatulence as Barney raced every foot of the way. He could hardly wait for the ice house crew to unload so he could return for another load of ice.

By dusk, Barney had worked up to such a fever pitch that it approached insanity. He must have thought he was saving the world from some impending disaster if he could but store enough ice to last the following summer. Oh yes, Barney could think like that-- of this I was certain.

The last trip of the day left the lake a huge gaping hole, exposing enough open water to make one believe it was summer. It seemed that on each trip Barney was determined to set a new speed record, especially if each load was heavier than the last. Deep down, I had a gnawing fear that somehow something about this last trip was wrong. I had never seen him so lathered up and even his spirit changed from plain determined effort to one of sickish obsession. Somehow, even the flying snow and rhythmic farts lost all humor to me. There was no holding back on Barney. I didn't have enough strength in my young hands to contain his insanity, nor would I have insulted his intelligence by trying. He was the master of his own destiny.

As I unharnessed him that evening, I noticed a strange bulge protruding under his belly. The veterinarian's diagnosis was traumatically driven home as father came for the shotgun. "William, you stay in the house!" said father trying to bravely disguise his trembling voice. The quiet winter air was suddenly shattered by the thunderous blast, echoing, intermingling with a final quiet whinny. Through a veil of tears, Barney had left my life.

by
William Jamsa



the tracing of sound

*along the thin skinned membrane
enters a shaking nervous line
like sunshine off the hands clap
travels through rigid distance
and strikes vibrating like pane
windows on a windy day. heard,
its message is twisted like
that of the blind poet's
at his sabotaged keyboard.*

*a dull grey throbbing mass
sorts screeches and sighs
and deafens their blows
as a known face
in a lonely city
so we are not lost
in a strange forest of sound
the room is not
a sterile dustless affair
occupied by blinking hypnotic
lights and a man dead
turning knobs. rather
the vivid softness
of a lover's eye opening
from sleep then reclosing
curling and snuggling
into a moaning smile.*

*the wave. transformed. echos still
as the ocean rolls in our heads
eighty miles inland. the gun shot
is replayed.
again and again.
your laughter
returns
in my walks
winter and a bent figure passing
beneath a sick street light.*

*the song heard is sung
day after day
the friend of quiet men.*

*the wonder for so many is but electro-chemical terms.
radical changes in test tubes as the eyedropper rains
three precise tears down into them. colours appear
and temperatures rise. there may be equations accounting
for sound not dying but
heart
makes them dust
on a black board.*

steve behrsing

*In then out, then in again.
The white darkness lies hidden in the night.*

*Dry then wet then dry again.
So suddenly does it come, you almost forgot it was.*

*The traces prevail to remind you of its' being.
The wet leaves hide the dry Earth below them.*

Penny Fisher

*And the pill and society were not meant to be
A pill to relieve society
A pill to prevent society
And we screamed, "Do not take it"
You'll kill your mind and you'll kill others
And when you leave, no door of light
Or high flying wings but endless falling
And burning black soot cracking your skin.*

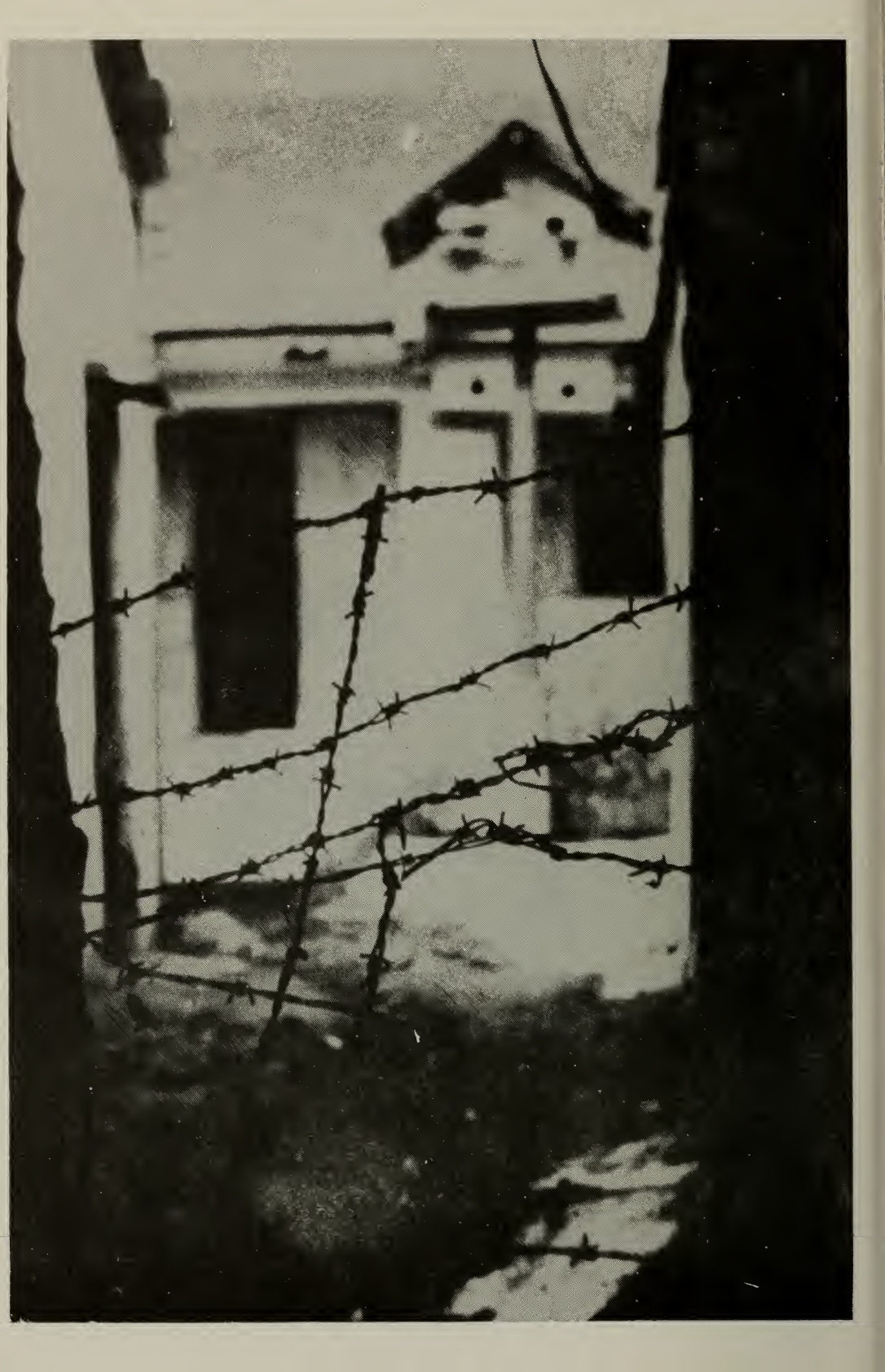
*We condemn the ungifted ones
For they know no better
Have not reached out and been held by
Him. We pity and laugh inside
Knowing we've been touched.*

*And Friday – no pork you sinner
No meat yesterday – tomorrow maybe.
Confess your evil thoughts – his filthy
Hands upon your breast you think and
tell.
So we sleep one more night together
In God's Grace – no pill but abstaining
Love.*

*O Christ, what am I doing to your
Name – The one I silently pray to
each night. The one I ridicule others with.*

Mary Ann Graham





All sing

*the ancient glistened lips
moving
the sureness of steel
locking upon
the marble
flesh breast
the nipple heightened
frozen to deul
the serpent attack
of the hardened tongue
the devouring
of the gummed jaw
the endless tail
twists moved
the legs entwine
climbing on
the touching tips
fingers shoot
gold
on the nerves
where flesh meets
flesh thunder
billows and rolls
the sea swells
rise
embraces
the sky
sighs
tender
and a kiss
rests
the wind*

steve behrsing

Bone and hairy fingers

*Or soft white flesh with greening veins —
Thrust out to redden or glide through
my skin. Spring out and reflex pulls
Them back like clock work.
I mean, what are we doing,
Are you an ape and I a flea?*

Mary Ann Graham

*Isn't it good to know you've got something
to live for— but what if your hopes and
dreams fall apart and your life turns
to war — and right when you are
happy your love leaves and closes
the door— Well, maybe you've
got it no worse than
you had it
before
!*

Christine S.

*and if poems were people
would they expect
as much from us
as we do of them*

Rich Harris

*Sun through the window
Kills the darkness of the room
Giving me your face*

Thomas F. MacDonald

*For many million years
The wind has survived upon this world
Without the fear of death.*

William Roy

The Touching of the Rain

Parsons lay on his back, and listened to the bothering of the rain. It had been coming down for weeks now, so that he was almost accustomed to the familiar, constant drone and was not aware of it, unless he actually listened. It had become a thing to be recognized by its absence; an invisible, impartial discomfort weaving its thread of dankness equally among the men.

When it had first come, suddenly and without notice, the wind had blown the rain through the screening on the barracks, and huge sheets of plastic had been nailed across the walls, so that with even the slightest breeze, Parsons felt as though he was hidden in the slimy entrails of a giant bird straining to fly; a Sinbad in the slippery clutches of the giant Roc.

The floors were swept and mopped constantly, but still had a covering of grey slushy grit left by people running to and from the rain. Every step left a mucous-like footprint that remained for several minutes after the walker had passed and until the plywood had managed to suck the squeezed water back into its swollen fibers.

Parsons shifted slightly on his bunk and felt the cold dampness in his clothes reaching out and searching for the dry spots on his skin. Nothing would be dry until the rains had gone for days and the sun had pulled the water back into the air.

He pulled a blanket up over his boots to his waist and lit a cigarette. It tasted soggy between his lips and it was an effort to draw any smoke from it. Nothing was untouched by the rain. At one end of the barracks, the housegirls were giggling and trying to coax shines from boots that had been washed down to the leather. The polish sat on the boots like globs of grease until one of the girls would decide that it was dry enough and then smear it across the toes with a wet rag. Fatigues were hung from the ceiling and rafters, to drip their wetness on the floor and dry as much as the humidity would let them.

Men lay on their bunks, sleeping or, under the bright circle of an overhead light, reading or writing letters. Some, like Parsons, just looked at the ceiling, thinking. Others just looked. The only result of movement was to become cold and damp in another part of the body and to irritate the already raw skin.

Parsons felt the chilly breeze that signaled the opening of the door. With the breeze, came the sound of footsteps moving in his direction.

Parsons pulled the blanket up over his head.

"My dearest, darling," the footsteps said coming closer. "Once again, I pray that this letter finds you safe. When I think of you out there, halfway around the world, my heart feels as though it will break into a thousand pieces. I long to hold you close to me again, and feel the soft touch of your lips against my breast...."

"Oh, Christ," Parsons moaned, and wrapped the blanket around him like a cocoon.

"Hi ya, Harry," the footsteps said, shaking his bunk. "How ya doin'?"

"Get the fuck out of here, Smith!" said Parsons. "Can't you see I'm tryin' to sleep!"

The footsteps laughed, sat down on the bunk next to Parsons and began to whistle the chorus to 'Chatanooga Choo-Choo'.

"Smith, you sonofabitch!" Parsons muffled voice yelled from under the blanket. "Would you shut the fuck up!"

The footsteps began chuckling again with a sound that Parsons could only compare to that of someone who had tasted human flesh and liked it.

"Narf, narf," the footsteps narfed, and began reading again. "I was so worried, my darling, when I read about the attack in the paper and realized that it was in the exact same area where you are now located. I can only pray and wait until I hear from you again, hoping that you were not injured. I am counting the days...."

"Goddammit, Smith, you mother!" Parsons screamed through clenched teeth, "If you don't shut the hell up, I'm going to come over there and beat you to death with my goddam bare hands!"

The footsteps smiled and started to whistle again, chuckling between choruses.

"Jesus," Parsons hissed, and throwing the blanket on the floor, sat up in his bed. Reaching for his cigarettes, he lit one, and looked across at Smith. "Lets have it, you bastard;" he said smiling as he shook his fist. "I know I got some."

"Have what, Harry?" Smith said innocently.

"Have what, Harry?" Parsons mocked. "Have my goddam mail! That's what!"

"You didn't get any," Smith chuckled.

"I got some; where is it!"

Smith crossed his footsteps on the bed and started whistling, looking at Parsons. "You flying this afternoon?" he said.

"I flew this fucking morning, you bastard, the same time you did, now lets have that mail!" said Parsons starting to laugh.

"Who'd you get for pilots?" Smith asked, starting to laugh, too.

"Goddam Baily and Simms, you jerk!" Parsons was jumping up and down, laughing and stamping his feet. "Now, goddammit, where's that mail!"

"I told you before, Harry, you didn't get any," said Smith, smiling.

"Someday, I'll kill you Smith," Parsons sneered, and then yelled down the barracks: "Hey, Pete, any mail come in today?"

"I don't know," the voice said, "I checked about an hour ago and there wasn't any. Some could have come in since then, though."

Parsons turned to Smith. "Let's have that!" he demanded, pointing to the paper in Smith's hand.

"Why? You want to learn the harmony?"

Parsons reached over and grabbed it. On the paper were the words and music to 'Chatanooqa Choo-Choo'.

"If you want to learn the harmony," Smith smiled, "I'll be glad to teach you."

"Where the hell's that letter!" Parsons said.

"I didn't say that *I* got any mail," Smith chuckled, "I said that *you didn't*."

"You bastard," smiled Parsons, "you stupid bastard."

"Then again," said Smith, "I didn't say that I *didn't* get any."

"Jesus," Parsons whispered, holding his head in his hands, "I think you *want* me to kill you. I mean why do you do this to me? Are you trying to drive me nuts? Do you think that just because you're a crazy bastard, you have to turn everyone else into a crazy bastard, too?"

Smith chuckled. "Harry, I do it because you are crazy *already*. If you weren't crazy, then you wouldn't keep playing the game. And Harry, I can honestly say that you're a better man for it. Why, just look around you! Look! Nothing but bodies waiting for the sun to come out. Why here we are in another part of the world; modern day Marco Polos...."

"Ah hah!" said Parsons jumping up. "I knew it! You are a crazy man! Marco Polo Smith! Crazy Narf Smith a traveller in a foreign land!"

"....and all you want to do is get mail and hang around the barracks feeling shitty. You're a real pioneer, Harry."

"Listen, you jerk," said Parsons lighting another cigarette, "why don't you be the pioneer and run down to the mail room and check the mail. I'll even lend you my compass."

"Harry, you have no spirit of adventure. Don't you want to leave your mark on the world?" Smith was laughing now.

"What the hell are you getting at!"

"Well, Harry, I was just thinking that if you had any spirit of adventure, then you'd get up and walk over to the mess hall with me."

"Oh, no! Absolutely not! My stomach still feels screwed up from breakfast. Anyway, these fatigues are just starting to dry. If I go out again, I'll be just as wet as I was before I started drying out, and my stomach'll be even *worse*. Thanks, but no thanks."

"Come on," Smith said, "even having pneumonia is better than hanging around here all day. Maybe we can grab a few beers or go into town or something after."

"Well, alright," Parsons said smiling, "but I'd just as soon skip the mess hall and just get some beers."

"Come over and drink some milk or something and you can get your stomach lined while I'm eating," said Smith, pulling on his poncho.

"Alright, but I'd still rather just start on the beers."

Except for the fact that there were no buildings on the road, it looked exactly like the rest of the area. There was no paving on the ground and the only way to tell that it was used as a path of sorts were the deep, muddy ruts left by trucks and jeeps that had gone through or had been stuck and then, after considerable swearing and groaning, been pushed on their way.

The wind whipped the rain across the ground so that the parts of their legs that were not covered by their ponchos were soaked almost as soon as they walked out the door. Parsons felt the cold sting of the rain on his face and began to wonder if the monotony of the barracks was but a small price to pay for the luxury of warmth and dryness.

"I don't know why the hell they can't pave this goddam thing so the water runs off," Smith said tightening the hood on his poncho. "The goddam engineers can build swimming pools, parking lots, barracks, anything; but they can't build a goddam road! I bet if the officers had to walk on this goddam thing to get to their messhall, the thing would be paved. It's bad enough when it rains on top of you without it raining under you, too."

"Why the hell should they pave it?" smiled Parsons. "We'll be pulling out any day now. Christ, Smith, don't you have any faith in your government? The poor zips are so beat they only mortar us about fifty times a week now instead of the usual fifty-one. Things *must* be getting better!"

"Yeah," said Smith, "but the only reason for that is the rains have slowed down our goddam supplies, so that the zips don't get to steal as much stuff as they usually do. They still steal it as fast as it comes in, but it's just coming in slower."

"Well, as they say," said Parsons, "c'est le guerre."

"Yeah, well as I say, *fuck* le guerre, and lets hurry up and get some goddam food before I freeze my ass off!"

The messhall was fairly small and was panelled with huge pieces of plywood that had large, faded murals of the Grand Canyon, Old Faithful, The Golden Gate Bridge, and New York City from the air. Everything that didn't move had been painted institutional green and, like everything else, seemed to be covered with a grey scum. The hall was filled with the unintelligible sound of a hundred people talking at once and the clanking of metal utensils on metal trays.

"Jesus Christ!" said Parsons unbelievably, looking at a pan of food, "What the hell is that!"

"I don't know," said Smith laughing. "There must be some kind of blight on in the states and they're shipping all the meat over here. Waste not, want not, I always say."

"Fuck you, Smitty, I want to know what the hell this is before I put it in my mouth."

"Hey," Parsons said to the cook behind the counter, "what the hell is this stuff?"

The cook was dressed in dirty whites. He was about six feet tall, and almost as wide. His eyes were red rimmed from drinking the night before and there was a black hole in the middle of his mouth where his front teeth had begun to rot away. Looking at Parsons, he tucked his greasy hair up under his hat. "Roast Pork;" he said, "sometin' wrong wit it?"

"Hell no, unless it really is supposed to be Roast Pork, then there's *definitely* somethin' wrong with it!"

"Listen," the cook said, moving closer to the counter, "this isn't a goddam restaurant.."

"That's no shit," said Smith.

"...and if you don't like it you don't have to eat it!"

"What the hell am I supposed to eat then, huh!" Parsons was shouting and the messhall had become quiet. "You ever hear of beri-beri, or rickets...."

"Or scurvy," said Smith.

"...or hives or calcium deficiencies or any of those goddam things!"

The men in the messhall were laughing now and the cook was looking around for some sort of support.

"I mean, what the hell am I supposed to do about eating," Parsons continued seeing Smith laughing uncontrollably out of the corner of his eye, "if the goddam food in here looks like this! Starve to death?"

"Listen," the cook said, "why don't you get the hell out of here if you don't like it and take laughing boy here with you."

"Why don't you come around here and say that, you greasy bastard," said Smith shaking his fist.

The cook started to move towards the counter and Parsons started to move towards the door.

"Parsons!" Smith hissed, "where the hell are you going!!"

"That guy'll kill both of us!!" Parsons said, "lets get the hell out of here."

"Well goddammit, you started this!!"

"I didn't want to fight with him though! I was only having a friendly conversation when you started shaking your fist!!!"

"Well goddammit," said Smith, "the least you can do is make this look half-way respectable! Make believe you're pulling me out of here!"

"Jesus Christ," Parsons said, and grabbing Smith around the arms started to drag him out the door. "I'll try to keep him back," Parsons yelled to the cook who was just rounding the corner of the counter, "but you better get away just in case I can't hold him! He's an animal when he gets like this!"

The cook stopped about fifteen feet away from Parsons and Smith and was obviously trying to figure out what to do.

Smith was struggling with Parsons as Parsons pulled him towards the door.

"Take it easy, Smith," Parsons said through clenched teeth. "Do you want me to hold on to you or not!!!"

"Let go of me Harry!" Smith was shouting. "Let me teach that greasy bastard a lesson!"

The cook started moving towards them again.

"Goddammit, Smith, I can't hold on to you if you keep kicking me!"

"Have to make it look good, Harry boy," Smith whispered over his shoulder.

"Well how'd you like me to let you go, goddammit! That'd look pretty good."

"Christ, no, Harry, don't do that", said Smith, as he pushed Parsons backwards towards the door. "That bastard'll kill me!"

Parsons felt the door behind him and pushed it with his elbow.

"Next time, you greasy bastard!" Smith yelled from behind the closing screen door, "next time!"

"You know," said Parsons putting up the hood on his poncho as he walked into the rain, "you are really fucking crazy! I mean, that guy would have beat the shit out of both of us."

"Well, he didn't, did he!"

"Not this time, but I bet he's not going to forget us for a long time! You are really fucking crazy!"

"Ah," Smith chuckled, "don't worry about it; you didn't want to eat there anyway!"

"Yea, but Jesus Christ, I didn't want to not eat there ever again!"

"Worry about that later, Harry. Lets go and get some beers at Phong's."

"You're really fucking crazy," said Parsons, shaking his head to get the water out of his eyes, "you really are!"

Phong's bar was inside a small building that had been built less than six months ago out of scrap wood and flattened beer cans, so that it looked like it had been standing for centuries. It was also called 'The House of Falstaff' because almost all of the beer cans were from Falstaff beer. The floor was covered with stolen linoleum tiles, all of which were chipped, and none of which matched. Plywood had been nailed to the inside and practically every square inch of it had been carved by GIs so that everything from obscene pictures of women to graffiti asking Little Orphan Annie to please call the eye bank was easily read by the casual drinker.

Phong, the current owner, was the American's idea of the typical oriental. He was small with not particularly long black hair and a candid white smile accented by two, huge gold front teeth, which he displayed whenever possible. His clothing consisted of an American fatigue shirt with various insignias all over it, a pair of Khaki colored undershorts and a pair of rubber sandals made from truck tires. When he saw Smith and Parsons come in, he stopped playing dominos with his wife and shuffled over to show them to one of his four tables.

"Smeet! Parson! Goddama! How you do? No see you long time! I tink maybe you go R and R or maybe you fini you go home! What you do?"

"What do you mean, what do we do! What do you do? Somebody told me that the MPs found you with a few 'boom-boom' girls in the back room."

"Goddamma, I no shickt you 'bout dis!" said Phong shaking his finger up and down. "Some place dey got girl dere for boom-boom. I no have 'dat here! Sometime, one guy he come here make trouble for me. He get drunk you know, don't know what de hell he do. He wan fight me! I tell him 'mudda fuck you goddamma, I don't want no trouble wit you here! You no dat, too. I have someplace here you come here wan eat sometin' get beer, I no wan' no trouble. Dis guy he get mad and he say he MP and he tell MP dey close dis place; nex' day, goddamma, MP dey come an 'dey tell me dis guy he say I steal money from him and he get VD from some girl I have here! Goddamma him sonofabitch he tell dem I do! I no do nuttin'!"

"And you never saw him again," said Smith.

"No! I don't know him," said Phong. "He spec five, same as you. He come here one time, have trouble I never see him no more for sure! MP dey come dey make me fini here for one mont. Goddamma, I louie beaucoup money! I see dis' guy 'gain, goddamma, I give cowboy money kill him for sure! I no lie 'bout dat, mudder fuck him!"

"Probably some goddam puke lifer," said Parsons lighting a cigarette. "Sounds like something a lifer would do."

"Goddamma, Parson, I tink dat for sure. Goddam lifer, he make beaucoup trouble! I see him I kill him for sure!"

"Well," said Smith, "how about two ba-me-ba and———what are you gonna have Harry?"

"Two bacon and egg with onion."

"Alright, make that four bacon and egg with onion, and no ice in the beer please."

"Ho-kay, tank-you," said Phong, with a gold smile, and shuffled back over to the bar.

"Did you go out on alert last night?" asked Smith.

"Yeah," said Parsons, "but that's the last goddam time."

"Why?" chuckled Smith.

"Because, every time I go out, the first shirt makes me the runner! There could be eighteen VC standing outside the bunker and he'd say 'Hey, Parsons, you run over to group and tell them we have all our men out! Last night they were still hitting the airstrip when he made me go out. I don't know if he does it because he hates me or because he likes me."

"Probably because he hates you," laughed Smith. "I don't think that he's ever gonna stop thinking that it was you who stole his gas mask."

"Well Christ, I had to! He's the only one that that bastard Akins will issue a new one to. He wouldn't even give a poncho to Pete until yesterday."

"Akins is probably saving it all so in case we get overrun by the VC, he can make a deal with them. I remember when we were down here during Tet, he wasn't going to give me any ammunition because I hadn't fired for record that year!"

Phong brought the beers over and Parsons and Smith both wiped the tops off on their sleeves, not bothering to use the cloudy glasses as they drank.

"What bunker are you in?" asked Parsons.

"Well, I'm not in any bunker any more."

"What do you mean? Everybody's in *one* of the bunkers!"

"I used to be in the NCO bunker, because there wasn't any room in the other ones, but they won't let me in any more."

"Why not," said Parsons, burping as he spoke.

"Two more beers," said Smith to the bar. "I think you were in An Khe that week, but we had mortar attacks about every night. None of them over here, but they were all landing on the airstrip."

Phong brought the beers and the sandwiches.

"Anyway," continued Smith, "they'd last for about fifteen minutes——in and then out again——but then we'd have to sit in the bunkers for about five hours until the Air Force decided that it was all clear. One night I was in the bunker, listening to all the lifers talk about what a good deal the army was and everything and choking to death on that goddam ten-for-a-nickle cigar smoke, so I decided to go outside and go to sleep on top of the bunker. I mean they had already hit us and I was pretty sure that they wouldn't bother us again until the next night. Well, I went up on the bunker and fell right to sleep. When I woke up, it was just starting to get light and everyone had gone back inside the barracks. I was still sort of groggy and when I stood up to get down, I dropped my helmet on the roof of the NCO hooch. Well, the first shirt thought that it was a mortar round that hadn't gone off but was in the hooch and about to explode any minute. He started yelling and screaming and yelling like a goddam madman and I was up there laughing my ass off. I was laughing so hard I couldn't get down!"

Parsons laughed with a mouthful of beer and felt it run out his nose down his chin, but couldn't control his body and decided the hell with it and waited for Smith to go on.

"All the NCO.s were running around trying to get their stuff in the dark. I could hear Akins screaming, and I thought Hulbert was going to break down and cry. They were all positive that any second they were going to be blown up. When they finally came outside it was almost completely light out. I was laughing my ass off still! Hulbert comes out and he's bleeding from the mouth, because the first shirt thought that he was a VC and knocked about three of his teeth out with a shovel. Akins comes out right after, and he's gimpy as a bastard because he fell over Hulbert after the first shirt whacked him and broke a toe. When they came out, I swear, it was so funny, I was actually paralyzed. Except for laughing, I couldn't move a goddam inch if my life depended on it. Anyway, right after that, the first shirt called me in and told me no more bunkers. He doesn't give a damn where I go when there's an alert, but no more bunkers."

"Well, where the hell do you go now?" said Parsons still wiping beer away from his nose.

"On top of the NCO bunker," said Smith laughing too, "but I just make sure I don't fall asleep."

"You crazy bastard," laughed Parsons. "Jesus!"

Smith and Parsons both ate rapidly, washing their sandwiches down with huge gulps of the Vietnamese beer. Smith took a piece of paper out of his pocket, and after whistling a chorus of 'Chatanoooga Choo-Choo', began reading. "My dearest, darling..."

"Now, goddammit, Smith," said Parsons, smiling through his sandwich, don't start that again, or I'll take you back over to the messhall and let the cook beat you head in!"

"You wan sometin' else Smeet; Parson?"

"No thanks, Phong," said Parsons. "You want anything else Smitty?"

"No, lets go."

"How much do we owe you?"

"Tree hunred P, Parson," said Phong.

"I hope to Christ that we didn't get any VD from the sandwiches," said Parsons as he handed Phong the money. "I'd hate to have to get the MPs down here."

"Goddamma, Parson," Phong laughed, "maybe I get cowboy kill you an 'Smeet, too. You tink maybe you like dat sometin!"

"No," said Parsons pointing to Smith. "I have enough trouble with Smith here without cowboys trying to kill me."

Smith smiled and chuckled as he whistled.

Phong watched them as they walked to the door. Their bootprints had almost disappeared from when they came in, and now there were new ones pointed towards the door.

Smith pushed the door open and felt the rain blow back under the hood of his poncho.

"Let's go back and see if the goddam mail came in yet," said Parsons.

"I told you, Harry, you didn't get any," Smith said as he turned his back to the wind, walking backwards to face Parsons."

"Now goddammit!" shouted Parsons, "don't start that again, you bastard; Pete told me that it didn't come in yet!"

"He told you that he checked it about an hour ago; I checked it right before I came in. You heard me reading the letter!"

"I saw what that was," said Parsons smiling again, "and for a minute, I forgot that you were so goddam crazy and I almost listened to you again." –

"Alright, Harry, go on down and check, but you're just wasting your time," Smith shrugged his shoulders and as Parsons went toward the mailroom, walked along the edge of the road to the barracks. "Hey, Harry," he yelled, "check and see if they forgot to give me all of mine!"

Parsons turned around and yelled "Fuck you, you crazy bastard!" and extended his middle finger up in the air with a laugh.

Parsons saw the smile freeze on Smith's face as the light lifted him off the ground. He felt something moving in his chest and face and saw himself falling, watching Smith thrown into the air against the side of the barracks. It was as though everything had stopped and he was a third person watching all of it. The next thing he became aware of, was the noise. It was not a noise that he heard through his ears, but a noise that seemed to explode from inside of his head. He felt his knees buckle under him as the upper part of his body was pushed back to the ground by a giant hand.

"Smith!" he yelled as he brought himself to his feet. "Smith!!"

He walked faster towards the body, only remotely aware that he was dragging one of his legs that did not seem to be responding to his brain.

"Smitty!" he whispered, "Come on you crazy bastard, quit fucking around!"

Smith's face was covered with blood, and both of his arms were pinned under his body so that it looked like he had none. Parsons took his poncho and wiped some of the blood off of the man's face.

"Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ!" he shouted "Where's a fucking medic! Where the fuck are the medics!!"

Parsons looked on the ground and under his knee was the paper that Smith had been reading from in the bar. The rain, the indiscriminate rain had begun to run the letters together on the page so that no one would ever be able to know what it said. It was as if it were finally taking a side; helping Smith with his game. A drop of blood landed on the page, and Parsons wiped his hand across his face as he read:

"My dearest, darling" once again, I pray that this letter finds you safe...."

Parsons read the letter until the rain and the blood had washed the words from the page and left him alone with the wind and the dead man.

by
Thomas F. MacDonald

